

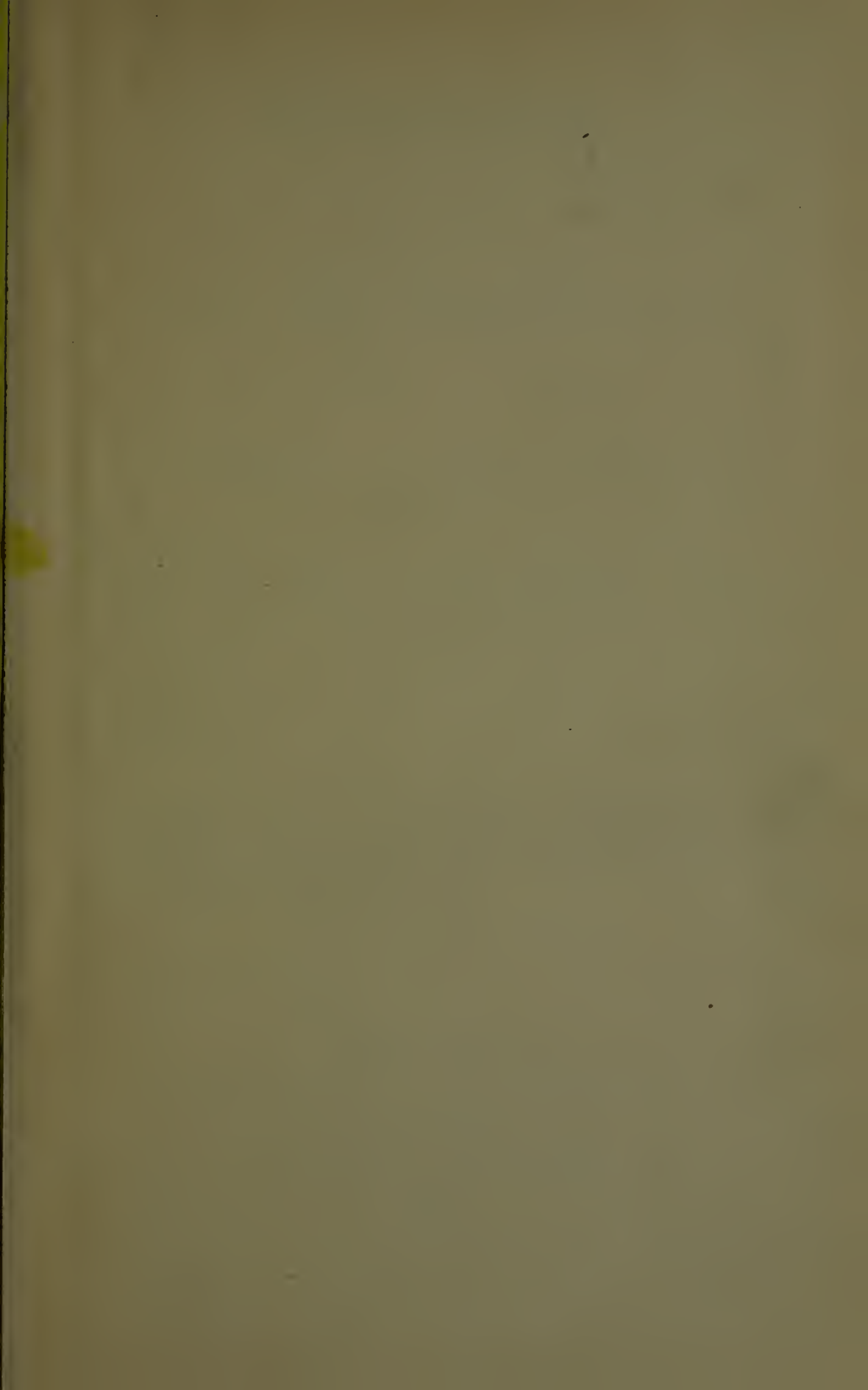


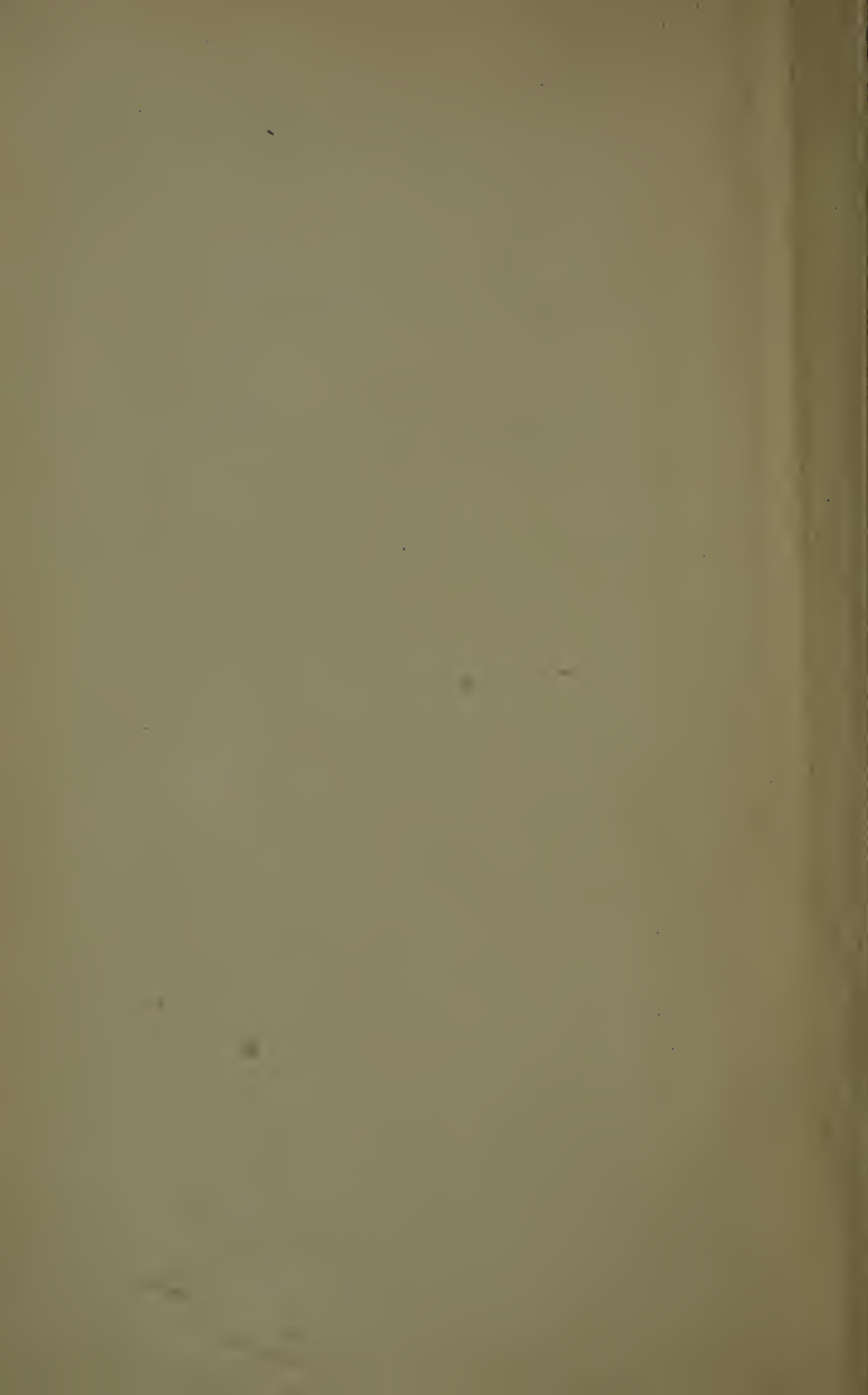
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METHODISM

AND ITS METHODS.

BY REV. J. T. CRANE, D.D.,

OF THE NEWARK CONFERENCE,

Author of the "Right Way," "Popular Amusements," "Arts of
Intoxication," "Holiness the Birthright of all
God's Children," etc.

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline, with which they first set out.—*John Wesley.*

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P R E F A C E.

THE present volume has grown out of the observations, studies, and reflections of an itinerant ministry of thirty-one years. Consequently, whatever defects may be discovered, either in the reasoning or the writing, haste cannot be pleaded in extenuation of them. He that has no love for the Church of Christ, in all its branches, will find little here that he will care to read. They who have not so pondered over its past history as to feel at least some degree of solicitude in regard to the future, their hearts, at times, like Eli's, *trembling for the ark of God*, will be liable to misconstrue both the aim and the spirit of these pages.

The author addresses himself to the candid, the devout, and the thoughtful, confident that whether they accept or reject the conclusions reached, and the sentiments expressed, they cannot fail to be deeply interested in the theme of the discussion.

J. T. CRANE.

BOUND BROOK, N. J., Nov. 25, 1875.

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METHODISM AND ITS METHODS.

CHAPTER I.

BEGINNING, GROWTH, AND PRESENT STATE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.—GEN. xlix, 22.

WHEN Jacob felt that the end of his long pilgrimage was drawing near, he summoned his sons, saying, *Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.* The dying patriarch then predicted the future lot, not literally of each son whose name he pronounces, but rather of the tribe to be called by that name. Reuben shall be strong, but unstable; Simeon and Levi are crafty and cruel; Judah is a young lion; Zebulon

loveth the sea ; and Dan is an adder in the path. But no one of the twelve is blessed with so much emphasis and beauty of language as Joseph, who is compared to a vine, *even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.* All these utterances are prophetic and admonitory. They foreshadow the coming prosperity of the Hebrew family, and at the same time remind them of their duty to God, and their dependence upon him for all the blessings that pertain to them, either personally, or as the founders of a powerful people.

History, rightly construed, is a wise counselor. It is well for each of us, from time to time, to review our lives, and learn what we may from our own experience. It is well for a nation to treasure up the memory of the noble deeds done in the years that are past, and the names that glow with the holy light of patriotism, that the sacred fires may not die out upon the national altars. It is wise for a Christian Church not to forget the toils, the sacrifices, and the successes of those who, by the help of the Great Builder, laid its

foundations, and began to rear its lofty walls.

We review the past, not from vanity, nor with selfish exultation, but that we may glorify God; and from the record of his gracious dealings with our fathers, and with us, in the years that are gone, derive new zeal and courage, new faith and hope, for the years to come.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, vital religion in the British Isles was at a very low ebb. England, like the rest of Western Europe, had once been under the ecclesiastical dominion of Rome; and although, when the Reformation dawned, the doctrines of Luther found friends, their progress was slow, and, for a time, they made little impression. Early in the sixteenth century, Henry the Eighth threw off the rule of the pope; but in its theories of religion, as well as in its forms of worship, the Church of England remained essentially Romish. His son, Edward the Sixth, first commanded the service to be conducted in the English, instead of the Latin tongue, and gave indica-

tions of a piety and zeal for God and the truth which had in them much of promise ; but after a brief reign of six years, he died. His sister, succeeding to the crown, soon earned for herself the title of Bloody Queen Mary. A Papist, zealous and relentless, and the wife of a still more fierce and cruel persecutor of the saints—Philip the Second of Spain—she restored the papal forms of worship in all the churches of the realm, and carried on a sanguinary persecution of the people of God. Bishops Cranmer, Latimer, Hooper, and Ridley, the brightest ornaments of the times, were burned at the stake ; and efforts, earnest, unscrupulous, and persistent, were made to fasten again upon the nation the iron yoke of Rome. Under the sovereigns who succeeded for the next century the tide of Reformation sometimes ebbed, sometimes flowed ; until at last, in the year 1689, William and Mary were crowned as the sovereigns of England.

They were Protestants, and desired in all proper ways to urge on the work of reform. Still, the Church long remained half papal.

The outside of religion received more attention than the spiritual life. With many, the form of a sacrament, or even the fashion of a priestly vestment, was matter of more concern than faith, hope, or charity. The Puritan movement, which had been so powerful in the days of Cromwell, had lost its purity and its power. The infidel works of Hobbes, Tindal, and others, were in full circulation, spreading their subtle poison on all sides. The clergy could boast some brilliant names, but the vast majority had little learning and less piety. The people were sunk in ignorance and vice. The Christian Sabbath seemed to be well-nigh blotted from the calendar. The parish parsons went through a mechanical service in the almost deserted churches, while those who ought to have been the worshipers spent the sacred hours in drinking, cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and all manner of brutal sports and amusements.

This is a dark picture, but it is proved to be correct by the evidence of the best men of that day. Watts affirmed that religion was dying out of the land. Archbishop

Secker declared that the distinguishing characteristic of the age "was an open disregard of religion." "Such," said he, "are the dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the higher classes, and the profligacy, intemperance, and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower, as must, if this torrent of iniquity stop not, become absolutely fatal." And a writer of our own times, in no wise given to exaggeration in that direction, says, that "the common people of England had returned to heathenism, or a state hardly to be distinguished from it." There were, indeed, exceptions among both the clergy and the laity, yet it cannot be denied that this dark portrait of the religious aspect of the times is true to the life.

In this gloomy hour it pleased the great Head of the Church to call Whitefield and the Wesleys to the gospel field. All three had been thoroughly educated at the University of Oxford, and regularly ordained to the work of the ministry. Having themselves tasted the joys of faith in the Son of God, they began to urge, publicly and pri-

vately, the claims of vital piety. But to the multitude they seemed as those that mocked. Foul words, and even brutal blows, awaited them on every side. The formal clergy of the Establishment were foremost among the persecutors. In the space of three days, Whitefield made application to the pastors of five different Churches in the city of London, and in every case was refused the privilege of dispensing the word of life. He returned to his native city, Bristol, and the pulpits there being also closed against him, he went to Kingswood, a mining region, where there was no place of worship, and there, on the 17th February, 1739, preached to the colliers in the open air, in defiance of what was called Church order. His congregations soon grew to thousands, and the Lord worked with him, *confirming the word with signs following*. Hundreds were turned from sin, and began to lead new lives. John Wesley joined Whitefield, and on Monday, the 2d of May, preached his first sermon in the fields, while three thousand people listened to his voice. His text was certainly

appropriate to the occasion—the text which Jesus himself took when he preached his first sermon in his own city of Nazareth—*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

Wesley now gave himself wholly to the work of preaching the Gospel, in the churches or the fields, wherever hearers were found. He formed societies, first in Bristol and then in London, that organization might give permanence to success. The work prospered; converts multiplied; chapels were built; preachers were secured as their services were needed; and in ten years from the date of that first out-door sermon, seventy fellow-laborers were aiding him in the dispensation of the word, and thousands of grateful souls recognized him as their spiritual guide.

At the twenty-third session of the Conference, held in Leeds in 1766, there were

reported forty circuits and over a hundred preachers, who carried the good news to hundreds of thousands of hearers in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

In the county of Limerick, Ireland, were several villages where the population was a peculiar one. In the year 1674, there being war between France and several of the powers of Europe, Marshal Turenne, at the head of a French army, invaded the Palatinate, a small German state lying on the river Rhine, and laid its towns in ruins. Many of the inhabitants fled into voluntary exile. They were Protestants, and thousands of them found refuge in Protestant England. Some fifty families finally settled in Ireland, where their descendants, in after years, gave the Methodist itinerants a warm welcome, and the truth of God wrought a powerful work. In the year 1760 a company of these German-Irish emigrated to America, and took up their abode in the city of New York. Among them were Philip Embury, a young local preacher, his cousin, Barbara Hick, a true "mother in Israel," and a few others,

who had been members of the Wesleyan Societies at home. But they were *as sheep having no shepherd*. They found no fellowship in the Churches around them. They were so few in number, that the idea of organizing a religious society seems at first not to have occurred to their minds.

Year after year passed on, and their love began to wax cold. In the year 1765 another company of their old neighbors arrived from beyond the sea. One day, in the ever memorable year 1766, Mrs. Hick, visiting among her lately arrived country people found several of them gathered together engaged in playing cards. Whether any of them were Wesleyans or not, does not appear. But her righteous indignation was roused. She seized the cards, threw them into the fire, and sharply rebuked the offenders. Then hastening to the house of Mr. Embury, she told him what she had witnessed, and what she had done, and with tears implored him to preach the Gospel to his countrymen. He objected, that he possessed neither church nor congregation. She told him to

preach in his own house, and offered herself to gather the congregation. He consented, and she hastened at once on her gospel errand. Soon she returned with four others, and to this congregation of five persons Mr. Embury preached the first Methodist sermon in America. He then organized his little company into a class, and arrangements were made for holding regular religious services. Their place of worship was soon thronged, the cold-hearted were reclaimed, and converts were multiplied.

Soon Mrs. Hick, who, rather than Philip Embury or Robert Strawbridge, seems to have been the apostle of American Methodism, began to urge the erection of a chapel. Again her pious zeal prevailed, and the John-street Church in New York city was built. On the 30th of October, 1768, Mr. Embury ascended the pulpit which his own hands had made, and solemnly dedicated to the worship of God the first Methodist Church in the new world.

Thus the sacred flame leaped the Atlantic, and began to kindle on these western

shores. Thus the vine, planted by the well of the water of life, shot forth a new branch, in whose fruitful buds God had hidden the germs of a mighty vintage.

In 1769 Mr. Wesley, whose quick eye saw every opening door, sent, at the request of these brethren, Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman from England, to labor in the new field. Two years later, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright reinforced the little band, and the great work of American Methodism was fairly begun. The same year that Mr. Asbury arrived preaching was established in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and circuits were formed in New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. The saving power of the Gospel was every-where manifest. Multitudes of souls were converted. From the ranks of the new converts God called forth new laborers, and sent them into the fields white to the harvest. Richard Owen, the first American preacher, William Watters, Freeborn Garrettson, Benjamin Abbott, Thomas Ware, and many others, began to speak *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.

Asbury traveled far and wide, preaching, inquiring, planning for the enlargement of the work, and performing an incredible amount of hard and even dangerous labor. Nor was their toil in vain. In the year 1784, when the American Societies were regularly organized as the Methodist Episcopal Church under our first bishops, Coke and Asbury, they numbered eighty-one preachers, and fifteen thousand members; and all along the coast, from the Hudson to the Savannah river, and from the Atlantic to the Alleghanies, the vine began to take root and spread its green leaves over the land.

Thus in the sunshine of God's smile, and watered by the dews of heaven, the vine grew. The older denominations, as well as the unbelieving world, called the Methodists enthusiasts and fanatics. They attacked our doctrines and derided our ministry. They lifted their voices in warning, and declared in the hearing of all the people, that our vine was *the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah*, and our fruit *grapes of gall*; but every cluster hanging within the reach

of their long arms disappeared from our vine and was found carefully tied to theirs. But still the vine grew. Its root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon its branches.

And now a hundred and nine years have elapsed since Philip Embury preached the first Methodist sermon in America to that little company of five persons. A century is but one throb of the pulse of eternity; yet in human affairs it may include events and develop agencies which change the entire current of history. Since that little congregation of five gathered, the world has seen a period of unparalleled activity and progress. This is especially true in regard to the Western Hemisphere. One hundred years ago there was not, on this continent, from the icy realms of the North to the frozen sea of the South, one independent civilized nation. Now, there are thirteen. Then, the English colonies, which just ten years after this sermon declared themselves independent of the British Crown, and took to themselves the name of the United States,

had between two and three millions of inhabitants, and possessed about one fourth of our present national domain. Florida was a Spanish colony. The vast valley of the Mississippi, then an unknown wilderness, was also claimed by Spain, by virtue of a recent purchase from France. Now we stand forth as a great nation, with forty millions of people, and a territory stretching from ocean to ocean, and from the lakes to the tropics. It has been a period of strife and commotion, and, during its progress, we have fought through five wars, and come out of them all victorious, the last not only removing from us the great source of national discord, danger, and guilt, but placing our institutions on a firmer basis than ever, and binding us together as one people, we trust forever.

It has been, also, a period of discovery, and investigation. It is the age that has invented the steamship, the locomotive, the steam-press, the telegraph, the photograph; that has discovered a hundred new planets in the heavens, and a thousand new isles in the sea. It has been a period of daring

inquiry, in which Hume penned his smooth sophistries, and Paine uttered his brutal sneers at the truth of God, and Voltaire joined in with learned lies and bitter laugh; a day in which no idea, or custom, or belief, has been deemed too sacred to be committed again to the crucible and subjected to fiery trial.

This, then, is the stirring, stormy period of the world's history in which American Methodism appeared on the stage of action, and began its work. One hundred and nine years ago, Philip Embury, the German-Irish local preacher, delivered that memorable sermon. And now what do we behold? The Methodist Episcopal Church is only one branch of the Methodist vine, and yet we alone number in members and probationers, 1,563,521 souls. We have 9,116 effective itinerant preachers, aided by 12,581 local preachers. We have built 15,010 churches, and 4,893 parsonages, thus gathering church property valued at more than \$78,000,000. Our Sabbath-school army consists of 18,628 schools, and 1,363,876

scholars, taught by 200,492 teachers, comprising together, a great host of 1,564,368 souls. Our Sunday-school libraries contain 2,529,000 volumes ; and the annual expenses of the schools are \$466,000.

We have 458 missionaries in foreign countries, or laboring among foreigners in our own land ; 1,059 missionary circuits and stations, with 56,241 communicants.

We have 30 colleges and theological schools, with 5,325 students, and \$6,000,000 in endowments and property. We have 77 academies, with 15,000 students.

Our publishing house has \$1,500,000 capital, and issues 17 periodicals, which circulate over a million of copies monthly.

The Methodist Episcopal Churches, North and South, with the various other bodies which have sprung from them, and still bear the Methodist name, and hold as firmly as ever the Methodist theology, number in the aggregate 3,000,000 communicants. Truly *the little one has become a thousand*, and the *small one a strong nation*.

Nor have we gained our great numerical

strength by any indirection. We have not appealed to the fears of the weak, by pretending to be the only authorized dispensers of grace and salvation. We have not courted the suffrages of the frivolous, the wicked, or the worldly, by flattering them with the idea of an easy way to heaven. For the whole period we have borne a steady testimony against intemperance, and slavery, and every species of sin and wrong. We have ever urged the claims of inward and outward holiness, proclaiming the reality of spiritual religion, and encouraging our people to seek high attainments and a deep experience.

To the statement made in regard to the rapid growth of our Church, we may add that this wonderful progress has been uniform from the beginning; and that the last ten years have been as full of Gospel triumphs as any period of the past. There is no other Church organization in the land, or in the world, which is so rapidly gathering the elements of usefulness and Gospel power. When we look at the work already accomplished, and see with what accumulated

strength we are entering upon the second century of our history, we are ready to exclaim, *What hath God wrought.* The divine hand, not ours, hath done it, and *unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

But while Methodism is not the work of men, either the living or the dead, we are not called to deny that God chose wisely the agencies by which these vast successes have been accomplished. While, therefore, we recognize with joy the hand of God, let us look at the instruments which that hand employed, and note their power and efficiency.

I. The simplicity and truth of the doctrines which Methodism teaches are among the chief elements of its power and causes of its success.

These doctrines I need hardly stop to name. We hold, in common with other evangelical Churches, the fundamental truths set forth in the Apostles' Creed. We believe in God the Father Almighty, in the

true divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ ; that he died for the sins of men, and rose again from the dead ; and that he will come again at the end of the world, in the glory of his Father, to judge the quick and the dead. We “believe in the Holy Ghost,” “the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” We hold, and from the beginning have proclaimed in the strongest terms, the depravity of the whole human race, in consequence of the fall ; and man’s utter inability to save himself from condemnation, except as he is graciously aided from above.

We hold, too, certain doctrines which distinguish us from some other branches of the Christian Church. No other Church has defined so clearly, and defended so strongly, the doctrine of the freedom of the human will, and man’s consequent just accountability to God. We believe that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man ; that he not only made an atonement of sufficient value for the whole human race, but so designed it for every

man as to open to him the gate of heaven ; and that all have eternal life placed within their reach, and offered them, not in words only, but in deed, in truth, in good faith. John Wesley taught, and his sons in the Gospel have always taught, that the reason why one soul is saved and another lost is not to be found in God's arbitrary determination—not in the will of the Almighty—but in the voluntary action of the men themselves ; because while both were graciously enabled to comply with God's terms in the offer of eternal life, the one accepted where he had the power to refuse, and the other refused where he had, through grace, the power to accept.

He who accepts this doctrine must deem it possible to fall from grace, even after genuine conversion. If man is really a probationer for eternity, his destiny is not fixed until his probation ends ; and we have no evidence that the first act of true faith in Christ does thus end probation. That a true child of God may fall into sin is proved by the fact that Moses, David, Peter, sinned,

and we have no proof in the word of God that sin is safe for any man; or that any man, knowingly, willfully, deliberately violating the divine law, does not thereby imperil his eternal welfare.

No other branch of the general Church has so encouraged the penitent to seek for a divine consciousness of pardon, the witness of the Spirit that he is a child of God. No other system of theology so cheers the heart of him who is warring with sin, by the assurance that victory is attainable; and as Epaphras prays that the believers at Colosse may *stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*, so the humblest follower of the Crucified may, by faith and fidelity, ardor and patience, through the grace of God conquer the enemy, and be *preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

We do not assume that these doctrines were discovered by the Wesleys, or that the Wesleys were, even in their own day, the only expounders of them. On the contrary, we claim that these doctrines are eminently scriptural, agreeing both with the letter and

the spirit of God's word, and that from the time of the apostles they have never lacked advocates. Still, the embodiment of these great truths in plain, strong, burning words, in every sermon, not as the speculation of some dreamy theologian who studied and thought in his seclusion, but as the bread of life for the sinful and the perishing everywhere, was the peculiarity of our Church. The theology of Methodism—above all, the central doctrine of an atonement in the provisions of which every child of man has a share, and by which, however sinful, however fallen, he may gain pardon, peace, holiness and heaven—is its power and its life. It was the mighty sword of the Spirit with which the early Methodist preachers won their victories; it was ever present in their minds and on their lips; it gave point and edge to every sermon; it thundered in every exhibition of the law; it wept and entreated in every exhortation to come and be saved; it rung out, loud and clear, in every line of every hymn; it was the soul of every prayer for souls. This simple, generous, scriptural

theology is the strength of the Methodist Church to-day. It honors God ; it exalts the Saviour ; it disarms man ; it strips the sinner of every excuse for sin ; and comes with the smile of divine love, and the outstretched hand of infinite mercy, to every lost, ruined wanderer from God. Amen, so let it be ! Let the voice of free grace ring through the world, till the mighty angel shall *stand upon the sea and upon the earth*, and swear by *Him that liveth for ever and ever*, that there shall be *time no longer* !

II. The success which Methodism, under God, has achieved, is due in part to the remarkable character of its first advocates and adherents.

Methodism was born in a college, and its founders were men of learning and culture. The verdict of impartial history is, that John Wesley was one of the world's great men ; that he was endowed with talents of a high order ; and that he might have aspired to the best rewards of fame, or wealth, or power, at which earthly ambition aims. His education was most thorough. At thirteen years

of age he left his home and entered the Charter House School in London, where he studied diligently three years. He then entered the University of Oxford, where he spent, first as student and afterward as teacher, thirteen years. He was well acquainted with ancient and modern languages, theology, history, philosophy, and general literature; and to the last year of his long life felt the deepest interest in the progress of human knowledge.

Wesley was a man of extraordinary judgment, energy, and perseverance, and I may add, courage. Where God and duty called him to go he went. No labor wearied him; no danger dismayed his calm soul; no difficulties sufficed to turn him from the path. And no conqueror ever thirsted for victory, nor statesman for power, nor poet for fame, nor miser for gold, more intensely than John Wesley thirsted to please God and save lost men. Compared with the salvation of sinners wealth, honor, and social position were so small in his eyes that to renounce them had scarce the merit of self-denial. How

could an intellect and a heart like these fail to make their mark upon the age?

See, too, the noble band of fellow-laborers that God gave him; Charles Wesley, bearing a harp attuned to the songs of seraphim; John Fletcher, gentle in spirit, but mighty in word; John Nelson, a man unlearned in the wisdom of this world, but taught of God, wise, spiritual, stout-hearted, valiant for the truth. These, and others like them, were divinely commissioned to lay strong and deep the foundations of Methodism in the British isles.

And men like them were divinely commissioned to lay the foundation of American Methodism. In incessant toil, in weight of personal influence, in the vigilance with which he looked after the welfare of the rising Church and the sagacity with which he guided its labors, Francis Asbury stood foremost in America, as Wesley did in England. And with Asbury there gathered a band of Christian heroes, thirsting for holy victory, and *mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds*; such as Coke, Whatcoat,

M'Kendree, Roberts, George, Garrettson, Lee, Abbott, and others, whose faces, voices, and words still have a cherished place in the memory of the aged among us, and whose names are *as ointment poured forth*.

In the early days of American Methodism, to become an itinerant preacher required something of the spirit of a martyr. Ofttimes a young man, believing himself called of God to the work, spent his limited means in a scanty equipment—a horse, saddle, bridle, and a pair of saddle-bags, (not large, for he had not much to put into them,) and with a single suit of homespun for his wardrobe, a Bible, a hymn book, and two or three volumes of Wesley's or Fletcher's works for his library, went forth to his toil. Through the cities and towns of the seaboard, through the villages and hamlets of the interior, through the scattered settlements of the frontier, searching out the forest home of the hunter and the trapper, these Gospel pioneers went, preaching a free salvation, sometimes to a single wondering hearer, stopped in the road, sometimes to a

weeping, rejoicing company of twenty, a hundred, or a thousand, gathered in a log-cabin, a barn, or under the friendly shadow of a grove. They rode from five to forty miles a day, almost invariably preaching once, and often twice or three times.

And as for salary, the idea never entered their hearts. The utmost that they hoped for was a bare support. There was a resolution of Conference, passed in 1774, that every preacher should be allowed \$60 a year and his traveling expenses. Two years later, the sum of \$80 was named, and in 1778 it was resolved that the wives of the few who were married should have the same allowance as their husbands; but on the new circuits, and many of the older ones, the money could seldom be raised. In 1782 we find the Conference debating over the scantiness of the supplies, and passing a resolution that every preacher should report to the Quarterly Conference all that he received from the people, even the present of a coat or a hat, the cash value of which was to be appraised by the united wisdom of the

preachers and the stewards, and charged on the books as a part of his regular allowance. One of the chief cares of Bishop Asbury was to devise the ways and means to keep his "poor boys," as he called them, decently clothed.

A story which is told in connection with the Bishop's portrait, will illustrate this. Certain warm friends of Asbury, in Baltimore, were anxious to possess his picture, and had long been urging him to sit for it, but he had refused again and again so decidedly, and almost sternly, that they ceased to urge it. But a crafty tailor caught him with guile. The Conference was held in the city, and the preachers came together, as usual, with glad news of revivals and gospel triumphs, but with pockets universally empty, and some with their clothing sadly out of repair. The Bishop went around in person among the more wealthy members of the city Churches, soliciting donations for the needy itinerants. Among the rest, he called upon a clothier who was one of those who had been teasing the Bishop in vain

about the picture. This wily brother laid down a large roll of cloth upon the counter, called attention to its excellent quality, and offered to have the whole of it made up for the preachers if the Bishop would allow his likeness to be taken ; and Asbury went off to the painter's without a word of remonstrance.

It would be unjust to them, as well as untrue to the history of those times, were I to neglect to say that the wives of these laborious, self-forgetful men, were worthy of them. Comparatively few of the early preachers were married. Indeed, when Bishop Asbury called them his "boys," the term was not inapplicable, as they were chiefly young men, unmarried, and therefore the better able to go forth to the field without requiring more than the mere supply of their daily wants.

It was a very common thing for a young man to join the Conference, give his services to the Church for a few years, and then locate. The history shows that up to the year 1814 there had been, in all, 1,620 preachers received into Conference, and

that of this number 820 located after having traveled about seven years each, on the average. Some of those who ceased to itinerate were married men, whose former earnings were spent, and who saw debts accumulating, which, in the itinerancy, they could never pay. Many of them were single men, who, having given several years of gratuitous labor to the cause, located, that they might marry without dragging themselves down into hopeless poverty.

Thus the local ministry, an agency peculiar to our Church, was reinforced, and became still more powerful for good, emulating within more narrow limits the zeal, the toils, and the successes of those who gave themselves wholly to the work. In fact the local ministry usually pioneered the itinerant. Not only did New York, Maryland, Canada, and the West Indies hear first from local preachers the good tidings of a free salvation, but all through the land, in a multitude of places where now large churches lift their spires heavenward, and worshipping thousands assemble, congregations were

gathered and souls were converted under their labors, before the itinerants of the nearest circuits could find time, amid their ever-increasing Macedonian calls, to come and receive into the fold the flocks waiting for them in the wilderness. All honor to a worthy class of men who have performed a vast amount of gratuitous labor. May they never lack successors!

But men, not a few, who already had families, continued in the itinerant ministry, resolved to endure all things rather than let the precious harvest be lost for want of reapers. And their remaining in the holy work depended in no small degree upon the piety, the faith, and the hope of their wives. These devoted women consented to be left almost alone, seeing their husbands only at intervals of weeks, or even months. For the sake of the Gospel they consented to train up their children almost unaided by the fathers' care and counsel. In some cases they maintained themselves and their children by the labor of their own hands, and by tireless industry and pinching economy

were able to furnish the threadbare itinerants with the clothing which the scanty collections on the circuits were not sufficient to purchase. The more we study the records of these times the more clearly does it appear that the foundations of this great Methodist Episcopal Church, which now in numbers and in wealth surpasses every other in the land, were laid, under God, by the zeal and courage, the poverty, toils, and tears, of a band of holy men and women of whom, as Paul says of the ancient exemplars of faith, *the world was not worthy.*

III. Another element of the efficiency of the Methodist Episcopal Church is found in its peculiar organization and plans of labor.

Its vigorous form of government enabled the leaders of the rising Church to avail themselves fully of all its resources, and to place every man in that part of the work for which he was best fitted. The circuit system rendered it possible to maintain regular religious service in any little neighborhood where there was a single Methodist family, or even a family friendly

enough to Methodism to open their house for divine worship and to entertain the itinerant for a night. The class meeting bound the new converts together in the bonds of tender Christian love ; and in the hour of spiritual peril, brought to the help of each the strength of Christian friendship. The Quarterly Meeting, with its three or four pungent sermons, its love-feast with its rich experiences and stirring songs, its generous hospitality and social enjoyment, was a holy festival worth all the saints' days in the calendar, drawing the people from far and near, and sending them to their homes strong in the Lord, and singing their choral hymns as they went till forest and hill rang with their sweet melody ; while at every house which they passed amid the shadows of the night, the sinner awoke to listen with awe, and wonder whence came the mysterious voices which thus swept by in the darkness, till the last note died in the distance. The Annual Conferences were councils of war, where these Christian soldiers told, with tears of rapture, of the triumphs of God's

grace in the salvation of souls, and where they laid their plans for bolder campaigns, and more extended conquests. They shrunk from no labor; they dreaded no danger. They waited not for the laying out of regular roads through the forests and over the mountains, nor for the building of bridges across the rivers. They only asked where souls, immortal souls, could be found waiting for *the blessed Gospel of the Son of God*.

At the close of Conference these warriors seized their saddle-bags, and turned their horses' heads toward their new fields of toil and suffering, their hearts swelling with a grander, holier chivalry than ever nerved the arms of the knights of old when they girded on their armors of steel to battle with the Turk for the holy sepulcher and the land of the cross. They loved God with all their hearts, for his Spirit witnessed that they were the sons of God. They loved the blessed Gospel which they proclaimed, for it had been to their own souls *the power of God unto salvation*. The cross was their ensign, and under it they conquered. They

loved all the children of God, for they were united to them by the golden chain of an immortal brotherhood. They regarded with peculiar affection their fellow itinerants, as a good soldier loves his comrades ; for they shared the same toils and dangers, and marched in the ranks of the same triumphant host. They loved the rigid rules of their order, as the intelligent soldier loves the stern discipline which transforms the tumultuous crowd into the iron strength of an army. Thus a deep and clear personal experience in divine things, a lofty devotion to the cause of God, and fervent brotherly love for each other, gave unity and compactness to their organization, lent vigor to their gospel enterprises, and made them, through God, invincible.

Thus we have reviewed hastily the origin and progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and discussed, briefly and in part, the causes of its success. It is a history of mighty faith, deep devotion, heroic toil, and marvelous achievement. We will not boast and be proud of our Church lineage, but we

will rejoice, giving glory to God. The Church is truly *a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.* We do not claim the vine as our own, as if our hands had laid upon its green leaves the sunbeams and the dew, or dug the well whence its roots draw life ; but with gratitude in our hearts, and praise upon our lips, we sit down in its broad shadow, and bless God for the sheltering foliage and the goodly clusters.

The beginning was very small ; but with what vigor and accumulating strength we are entering upon the second century of our Church life. That little band were fearful because they were few and weak ; we must not trust in ourselves because we are many and strong. While the prince of Chaldea was humble, God gave him the victory, and all nations feared before him ; but when he walked in his palace with uplifted head, saying proudly, *Is this not great Babylon, that I have built ?* a voice from heaven pronounced his doom, and the crown fell from his brow. Let us never for one moment

dream that with numbers, and wealth, and organization, we have less need of the grace of God, the instant aids of the Holy Spirit. A Church is truly successful only as the Lord speaks in its ministry and works with its membership.

If our ministers and people should ever decline in vital piety, in that hour our very numbers and wealth will become sources of peril. The leaderships of this great host will become glittering prizes in the hungry eyes of unholy ambition. As in the presence of the Egyptian monarch the peaceful crook of the shepherd turned into a hissing serpent, so the posts of honor and of influence inseparable from our compact organization will change to matters of strife, unknown to the Churches whose government is less central and vigorous. The vastness of the area covered by our labors will furnish room for the gathering of sectional parties, formed for the acquisition of power and place. In the annual distributions of ministerial labor, self-seekers will find a place to employ their crooked devices; and brotherly

love and confidence, without which we are even weaker than other men, will fail as justice and honor decline. And then will come upon our beautiful vine a blight and a mildew under whose deadly touch the leaves shall wither, and the untimely grapes fall. Ceasing to holy, we shall cease to be safe.

We reverence and love the vine by the well, the goodly vine beneath whose fruitful boughs we have our happy home. And while we honor the memory of the fathers, let us strive to be their worthy sons in the Gospel. Let us cling with a strong grasp to the mighty truths with which they won the battle. And above all, let us not be content with bearing an honored name; but let us be sure that we also inherit the faith, the fervor, the wisdom, the energy, the zeal for God, and the love for souls, which, for a hundred years, have made Methodism a power in all the land. Our Church has been called to no temporary, short-lived work. God will never cancel our commission till we cease to be what our fathers were.

Therefore, confessing our sins, renewing

our vows, repeating every act of personal consecration to the service of the Saviour whom we love and the God whom we adore, let us implore a special benediction, a special pouring out of the Spirit of grace, which shall fill and purify our hearts, and touch our lips as with fire from the prophet's altar. Numbers, wealth, and organization avail nothing where the Spirit of the Lord is not. *Our sufficiency is of God.* The ship may be great and strong, and the crew numerous; it may bear aloft its towering masts, and spread abroad its cloud of snowy canvas; but if no winds of heaven breathe along the deep, the vessel lies motionless upon the sea, or silently drifts toward the treacherous shoal and the hidden rock.

A noted writer, discussing in no unfriendly spirit the origin of Methodism, and the history which God has given it, expresses the opinion that the peculiar energy and power which marked it at the beginning are not the permanent attributes of any Church, but were rather the inspiration of the hour;

that Methodism already gives indications that it is losing this inspiration, and we show a tendency to settle down to the level of other and older organizations.

Is it so? Is Methodism but a momentary flame, swift and bright, suddenly blazing up, and as suddenly dying away, like the autumnal fires that sweep the prairie? Must we place the gospel triumphs of our fathers among the marvels of old, which belong to us only as a part of the history of a wondrous past, never to be repeated? It cannot be; *the Lord's hand is not shortened*. The great heart of Jesus has not ceased to beat with love and compassion, nor has his precious blood lost its power. Nay, as the measured march of the ages goes on, we may look at each successive period for still mightier, grander triumphs of divine grace in the salvation of men, till the Gospel shall reach the dark places of every continent, and every scattered isle of the sea; and beautiful upon all mountains shall be the feet of them that bring good tidings, and publish peace, and in all the babbling tongues

of earth exulting voices shall say unto Zion, *Thy God reigneth*. Must our commission run out before the dawn of that day of final victory? It cannot be. We humbly trust that in all the years to come, whenever the hosts of God shall be marshaled for spiritual battle, the banner on which is inscribed a free and full salvation will always float aloft among the foremost, and that underneath it serried ranks may gather, and stout hearts beat, and good swords flash.

And as if to refute the false reasonings of the worldly wise, and inspire us with new courage for the contest, our God gives us new proofs that his smile is upon us. These later years are full of such displays of God's power to save as our fathers scarce ever saw when their successes were greatest. All along our extended line the conquering legions advance, and the conquests of the Redeemer are multiplied. Souls saved by the blood of Christ *fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows*. Never were the skies above us brighter than now. Let the Church be humble and holy. Let her be

in the future, as she has been in the past, abundant in labors for God and souls, and her Lord will be with her *alway, even unto the end of the world*. NOW UNTO HIM THAT IS ABLE TO DO EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY ABOVE ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US, UNTO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT ALL AGES, WORLD WITHOUT END. AMEN.



CHAPTER II.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION, AND THE PRINCIPLES WHICH DETERMINE ITS VALIDITY.

“And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us : and we forbade him, because he followed not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not.”—MARK ix, 38-39.

HAS the Methodist Episcopal Church a right to be? Has its ministry scriptural authority? Are the sacraments dispensed by their hands valid? In a word, is it part of that Church which Christ founded on the Rock?

This has been questioned, and even boldly denied. Neither the source whence such attacks come, nor the spirit with which they are obviously made, entitles them to any great degree of respect ; nor do we feel that our Church needs any labored defense in regard to its origin and validity. Still, allusion is made at this point to these assaults because we desire to examine briefly certain great principles which underlie all true

Church organization. In various discussions concerning Mr. Wesley's ordination of Dr. Coke, in 1784, and the action of the Baltimore Conference of that year, right conclusions are often reached; yet it is not always made to appear as clearly as it might be, that those conclusions are based squarely on the true foundation. The principles which govern the case are not always brought directly into view, and even when cited do not seem to be appreciated and trusted as their solid strength deserves. Dr. Stillingfleet, in his "*Irenicum*," plants his argument on the immovable foundation when he states his main position: "I assert, any particular form of government agreed on by the governors of the Church, consonant to the general rules of Scripture, to be by divine right; that is, God, by his own laws, hath given men a power and liberty to determine the particular form of Church government among them."—*Irenicum*, p. 41. In the Church, as well as the State, government is divinely sanctioned, but no one form of organization is prescribed as of universal obligation. If

the people, at any given period of their history, are convinced that a civil monarchy will best promote the public welfare, they have a right to establish it; if they believe that a republic will in the largest degree promote the public good, they have a right to establish a republic. So in the Church of God: organization is needful that order may be maintained, and that the great work of the Church may be prosecuted faithfully and efficiently; but it is left to the conscientious judgment of the Church itself to determine what form of organization is best suited to the times in which it lives, and the field in which it works.

We reach this conclusion from more than one point of departure. One of the fundamental principles of Protestantism is, that all true piety is the result of honest conviction, and consequently, in matters purely religious, not only is coercion wholly out of place, but that every man should regard it as his right and duty to read God's Word, and learn for himself what it teaches. There is a point, indeed, beyond which "no stran-

ger intermeddleth." In the silent depths of the soul—in the inmost recesses of being—God and man meet, and there, whither no human voice can penetrate, no human hand reach, the controversy goes on, and the great question of life and death is determined. The Bible is God's voice to men. Each is entitled to the privilege of hearing it with his own ears. The Papist declaims against private judgment in matters of religion as a most perilous thing; but there is no judgment at all, anywhere, except private judgment. Rome assures me that I cannot understand the Gospel till an infallible pope has explained it to me. But how am I to understand the pope? My only choice is, whether I shall exercise private judgment on the text or the comment; on what God says, or what man says that God says. And who will dare to tell us that the comment is better than the text? And if Peter was the first pope, and all the popes are Peters, how does it happen that the first Peter is an unintelligible and dangerous teacher of the people, and the last one is plain and safe?

But if men read the Scriptures for themselves, they may differ in their interpretation of the doctrines taught. The history of the Church seems to indicate that diversity of opinion is inseparable from religious freedom. The religious opinions of different men are sometimes not only divergent, but even logically antagonistic. And there are limits within which men may differ not only without forfeiting the divine favor, but without dimming their luster as lights of the world, or lessening the practical value of their piety. They may differ so widely that while they do not lack Christian regard for each other, they cannot work together with advantage. Paul and Barnabas so differed in judgment in respect to a practical matter that they separated, and each went his own way. We may wonder that both of them should be so unyielding, nevertheless we do not question the piety of either; nor can we fail to note the fact that the "contention" which arose between them gave rise to no bitterness of spirit on either side, but merely sent them off in different directions, and thus

gave a wider range to their ministry of life and salvation.

Again, those who read the Scriptures may come to different conclusions in regard to Church government itself. A mere glance at the history of the Church shows that the present multiform modes of organization are not modern devices, nor the peculiar results of latter-day depravity, but that they have existed in almost every age of the Church. This diversity is inseparable from religious freedom and an open Bible. One sincere servant of God reads and honestly believes that Episcopacy is indicated by the few scattered hints which the Scriptures give us on the subject of Church order. Another, equally good and intelligent, sees only the Presbytery in the apostolic narrative and the epistles. A third, every way the peer of the other two, finds no warrant in the Scripture for any but the Independent form. Holding different and, in some respects, opposite theories, they are yet one in heart and in life. They fear God, they love the Saviour, they repent and believe, and by faith

are saved. They pass unharmed through the temptations of an evil world, and their lives shine with holy light. The dark days of persecution come, and the sword and the flame await those who have turned from idols to the living God; but they count not their lives dear unto themselves, and are faithful even unto death. Are they not Christians, all three of them? Will the gate of pearl be closed against this one because he styled his pastor a bishop, or that one, because his minister bore only the title of elder? Surely there can be no flaw in the reasoning by which we conclude that if men are to read the Bible with their own eyes, they must be allowed to judge of forms of ecclesiastical government as well as of doctrinal systems; and that if incidental differences of creed may exist among those who nevertheless bear worthily the name of Christ, there may also be diversities of organization and yet each be a part of the true Church of God.

Thus good men are liable to form such diverse opinions in regard to religious doc-

trine, or Church government, or plans of doing the work of the Church, that there is more of utility, and even of true unity, in amicable separation than in ill-yoked fellowship. The right to deal with the greater implies the right to deal with the less. If we have the right to judge for ourselves in regard to the nature of God, the plan of salvation, human duty and human destiny, surely we are not treading on dangerous ground when we venture to discuss forms of Church organization, or decide whether duty demands that we found a new organization. If it be true, therefore, that men are accountable to God, and not to each other, for their religious views—if the grand Protestant principle of religious freedom is sound—then we must conclude that any body of Christian men, agreeing in regard to doctrine and Church usages, and desirous of forming a closer union among themselves, have, by the will of God, a right to judge of the time when they are called to carry their plans into effect. If the American Methodists had a right to adopt and maintain the

peculiar opinions which they held, they had a right to organize all needed agencies for the spread of those doctrines. From the great Protestant principle of religious freedom, it follows that the Methodists of 1784 had a scriptural right to organize as a Church; and the ecclesiastical edifice which they erected is not built on the sands of human presumption or caprice, but is founded on the living Rock, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. This principle being conceded, certain specific conclusions follow:—

1. That different forms of Church organization, existing at the same time in different sections of the Christian body, or existing at different times in the same Christian communion, may be equally valid and equally binding upon the individual members of that community.

2. That in every body of Christians, providentially separated and set by themselves, there inhere the right and the authority to organize a Church government where none as yet exists, or to modify the form of government under which they are living.

It may not always be easy to tell how this power is to be exercised. It may be impossible to frame set rules showing the precise time when changes become allowable. It may be difficult to define beforehand who should lead in constructive movements; nevertheless, the right and the power exist in every body of Christians, and the time may come when to refuse to act is disloyalty to God and the true Church of God. This right is not license and anarchy. It is hedged about on every side by limitations which men disregard at their peril. Nothing must be set aside which is clearly enjoined in the Scripture. Nothing must be adopted which is clearly contrary to the letter or the spirit of the Scripture. All must be done with a single eye to the glory of God and the good of men; nothing through caprice, passion, insubordination, pride of opinion, self-seeking, or ambition. They who enter upon the duty of framing or amending forms of Church organization must not only bring holy hands to the work, but must employ their highest intelligence in it, asking the wisdom that

cometh from above, that their action may be such as shall best secure the peace and safety of the flock of Christ, and best enable the Church to reach and save the world. And when those in whom resides the right to act in the case have acted, in the due exercise of their godly judgment, and within the limitations named, and a system of Church order has been established in which there is nothing contrary to the Scripture, and the work has been done wisely and intelligently, meeting the wants of the people and of the age, and showing itself powerful for good in the field which providentially falls to it, then that organization has a divine right to be, and that Christian body is an integral part of, the true Church of God. And wherever a body of believers, providentially set by themselves, thus unite in holy fellowship for mutual aid and sympathy, the maintenance of the ordinances of religion, and the prosecution of Christian work, that organization is not subject to the control of any other Church, but contains within itself, by the divine will, all needed authority to proceed

in its labors of love, and to supply what may be lacking in its instrumentalities. In fine, God's Church grows directly out of God's word ; and as plants propagated by cuttings, whether taken from the twig or the root, sometimes degenerate and tend to die out ; as the worn-out peach-tree grows barren and short-lived, and the worn-out potato rots in the ground, and the cultivator is compelled to resort to fresh seed to secure a new succession, endowed with new vital forces, so Church organizations sometimes lose their vitality and cease to be available for their great mission, and the Lord of the harvest starts new ones from the seed.

These, then, are the general principles which are applicable to the work of Church organization. In applying them to the case of the Methodist Episcopal Church three questions present themselves :—

1. Did the American Methodists, in 1784, have a right to organize as a Church ?
2. Did those who concurred in the organizing of the Methodist Episcopal Church have a right to act in the case ?

3. Did they in any way so lapse from Scripture rules as to render their work of doubtful validity?

The answer to the first question does not seem difficult to find. The American Methodist societies were from the first separate from all the other Christian bodies of the land. Some of their members did indeed apply, occasionally, to the ministers of the Episcopal Church for admission to the Lord's Supper, or for the baptism of a child, just as a stranger now comes to any minister of the Gospel to ask him to perform the marriage ceremony or conduct a funeral service; but no pastoral authority was claimed on the one side or acknowledged on the other.

Moreover, when the American Revolution came, the Church of England ceased to exercise, or even claim, jurisdiction over the Episcopal Churches of the colonies, and left them without organization, and, as they seemed to conclude, without the power to organize. There were Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist Churches at hand, but

they had no shadow of authority over the Methodist societies, for these societies were certainly not indebted in any degree, for their existence or their success, either to the active labors or the kindly sympathies of their ecclesiastical neighbors. There was no American Church out of which the Methodists had grown, or from which they had withdrawn themselves; there was none with which they were under obligations to unite, or with which they could unite, even if they had been eager so to do. Their zealous opponents denounced them as teachers of false doctrine and intruders upon other people's territories, and sometimes even as enemies of their country; but no one dreamed of charging them with *schism*. The Methodists were made a separate and distinct people, not by the mere accident of a separate origin, but by the doctrines which they delighted to preach, the religious experience which they cultivated, the peculiar plans of labor which they had adopted, and the energy and self-sacrifice with which they toiled for God and souls. The great Head of

the Church seems to have called them out and set them by themselves for a special work.

The Methodist body, thus independent of all others, and opposed and rejected by them, was developing a wonderful spiritual power, and accomplishing, under God, wonderful results. Multitudes were brought from darkness to light. True converts, changed not only in their opinions but in heart and in life, came *as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows*. Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, the first missionaries sent by Wesley, landed on the American shores in 1769, and fifteen years thereafter eighty-one faithful evangelists were toiling in the gospel field, and fifteen thousand members were enrolled as the fruit of their earnest ministry.

It was evident, too, that the work was only begun. The success already given was not the victory in which these spiritual warriors were to rest, but only *the sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry-trees* calling them to battle. These ministers of God,

when they gathered in the memorable Conference of 1784, were not like so many reapers coming home weary at eventide, the last rays of the fading twilight guiding their way, and the last sheaves of the gleaning loading their wains. They stood rather in their strength, sickle in hand, amid the growing light and the early dew of the morning, while far away on every side stretched the golden harvest in endless perspective.

The work of the early Methodist evangelists was not only important but peculiar. None but they were doing it, and to human wisdom it would seem that none but they could do it. This work must go on. With the wide field opening before them, and a divine voice calling, they dared not cease from their labors, they dared not disband. To do this would be to prove false to every inner conviction, and to every outward token of duty. But the obligation to do the work involves the right to plan the work, to map out the field, assign the places of the workmen, and establish the rules necessary to secure harmony and efficiency of effort. In

a word, the societies were divinely called to organize and equip themselves for all Church duties and responsibilities, and they had a divine right so to do.

But was the Methodist Church organized by those who had a right to act in the case? Stillingfleet, as already cited, affirms that any form of government "agreed on by the governors of the Church" and consonant with the general rules of the Scripture exists by divine right. But who are the governors of the Church? In the case of the Methodist societies, who had a right, legal, natural, moral, or scriptural, to take part in the work of organization? It is easy to point in certain directions where no shadow of right existed, and whence even advice, to say nothing of criticism, would be an impertinence. The spirit of American liberty was steadily tending to set the Church free from the control of the State, and the civil law of the times interposed no obstacle in the way of the contemplated work. The Episcopal Churches of the country could claim no authority either to help or hinder,

for they were themselves in a state of utter confusion, and almost of wreck, with no bond of union among them, and at a loss even for a plan of union. The other Churches of the country had no right to utter a word or lift a finger. The Church of England could have no voice in the matter, notwithstanding the fact that the Wesleyan movement began within her pale, because she exacts of her clergy an oath of allegiance to the English sovereign as the head both of the Church and the State, and no American citizen could take such an oath.

The only persons, therefore, that could righteously claim a place among the framers of the plan of organization were John Wesley, the eighty-one preachers, and the fifteen thousand members of the American societies. Wesley, as he himself said, had grown into a true bishop, not through any far-seeing ambition on his part, but by the providence of God; and it would have been unwise as well as ungrateful for the American Methodists not to ask his counsel and co-operation. The preachers, who were

bearing the burden and heat of a day of hardest toil, poverty, and self-sacrifice, were certainly entitled to a place among those who were laying the foundations of the Church, and the people had rights which no just or wise man would be willing to see disregarded. In the formularies given in our ritual for the ordination of elders and the consecration of bishops, the office is declared to be committed to the elder or bishop elect, "by the authority of the Church." Who would venture to say that the Church consists of the ministry alone, and that the laity are no part thereof? To show precisely how much authority rightly belonged to each of these three parties—Mr. Wesley, the preachers, and the people—to say whose counsels ought to have prevailed in case there had been a conflict of opinion, might not be easy questions to settle; but we are happily saved from the necessity of attempting to settle them by the fact that all these parties concurred with the most complete and hearty unanimity. Mr. Wesley had been repeatedly importuned by both preach-

ers and people to devise measures whereby the American societies could become a regularly organized Church, with a government of its own, and a ministry who should perform all the duties of the sacred office. When he judged that the time had come for the doing of this work he prepared a plan which was essentially episcopal in its form. Knowing the desires of the preachers and the people, he proceeded to solemnly set apart Dr. Thomas Coke for the office of a superintendent or bishop, directing him in like manner to ordain Francis Asbury. The preachers, assembling in the Conference of 1784 for the purpose of completing the work of organization, felt that no small part of the responsibility devolved upon them, and took action accordingly. When Dr. Coke presented himself before them, and the letter of Mr. Wesley was read, there was no usurpation of authority on the one side nor blind submission on the other. The question was put, in parliamentary form, whether Dr. Coke should be accepted as the Superintendent of the Methodist so-

cieties under their new name of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the vote was unanimously in favor. Mr. Asbury was also elected by a unanimous vote. In like manner the entire plan of Church polity was adopted and established without a dissenting voice. The laity, indeed, were not present to bear a part in the formal action of the Conference; but it was well understood that the ministry and the people were a unit in their views and purposes. Referring to the general approval with which these proceedings were hailed, Ezekiel Cooper, who was present at the conference, remarks that "we shall seldom find such unanimity of sentiment upon any question of such magnitude." No one outside the circle named—John Wesley, the eighty-one preachers, and the fifteen thousand members in society—had the semblance of a right to say what form of organization the American Methodists should adopt. All inside that circle concurred with enthusiastic unanimity; consequently there was no disregard of the rights of any one concerned, no assumption

of imaginary authority. No unlawful hand was laid upon our ecclesiastical ark.

We now come to the third question : Did those who established the Methodist Episcopal Church so lapse in any way from Scripture rules as to render their work of doubtful validity ?

In the judgment of adverse critics our ecclesiastical structure has one defective spot, which is, as they state it, our lack of valid successional ordination. We do not design to review the long and weary war of words which has been waged on the general subject. Ponderous volumes have been written ; some to prove that no hands but those of a bishop convey authority in the Church of God, and that there must be an unbroken succession of these layings on of hands from apostolic times ; others, to show that ordination by the hands of elders is equally authoritative. Much of this debate has spent itself upon the mere surface of the question.

The Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church goes down to the root of the

matter. It asks, "How is a bishop to be constituted?" The answer given is, "By the election of the General Conference, and the laying on of the hands of three bishops, or at least of one bishop and two elders." In like manner, an elder is constituted "by the election of a majority of an annual conference, and by the laying on of the hands of a bishop and some of the elders that are present." A deacon must be elected by the annual conference, and ordained by a bishop. But if at any time there should be no bishop in the Church, the General Conference shall elect one, and the elders ordain him, and thus renew the line. Here, then, are two things, election and ordination, or consecration, whereby a bishop, an elder, or a deacon is constituted in our Church. But of the two, which is essential and which accessory? Which part may be modified, or done away? It does not require much reflection to make it manifest that the essential element is a valid election. The candidate must not only be called of God to the holy work, but this call must be seconded

by the solemn judgment of the Church, given either in general assembly or by her representatives. This is expressly affirmed in the forms provided in our ritual for the consecration of bishops and the ordination of elders. In the consecration of a bishop the language used is, "The Lord pour upon thee the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God now committed unto thee by the authority of the Church, through the imposition of our hands." The same expression occurs in the form for the ordination of elders. The sacred office belongs to him whom the Church has solemnly called to the work, and to him alone. The rite of ordination, performed without the sanction of the Church, conveys no authority in the Church. The doctrine that the election of the minister is nothing, and that ordination is everything, was unknown in the early history of the Christian Church. Matthias was the first minister constituted by the Church in her organic capacity, and he seems to have been named for the sacred office in an as-

semblage composed of the whole body of believers at Jerusalem. Stephen and the other deacons were chosen by the people. The testimony of Clemens Romanus, Cyprian, and Chrysostom shows beyond dispute that, in their day, the laity had a potential voice in the selection of the clergy. It was left to succeeding ages to lose sight of great principles, and hide usurpation under a veil of showy ceremonies.

What force or value, then, inheres in ordination? The Romish theory teaches that ordination is a true sacrament; that where it is rightly conferred it imparts, *opere operato*, peculiar grace to the recipient; that without it there can be no authority to perform the duties of the office, no validity in official services performed; and that, without the laying on of the hands of one who has himself been validly ordained, no official authority can be conferred. Some, not of the Romish Church, do not call ordination a sacrament, and yet hold that an unbroken line of episcopal ordinations is an essential element of a true Gospel ministry. This

theory, both in the Romish form and the "High-Church" modification, leads directly to Rome, inasmuch as it logically implies the organic unity of the Church. It is not difficult to make this appear.

An accredited minister is such by virtue of the authority of the Church which has placed him in the sacred office. If he severs his connection with the Church he surrenders his commission. He cannot, at the same time, be independent of the Church and remain a part of it. It is self-contradictory and absurd to say that I cannot indeed become a minister without the action of the Church, but, having become one to-day by such action, that I may to-morrow renounce and defy the Church, and still hold my office by a valid tenure. Every minister who secedes from the ecclesiastical body which gave him his office surrenders his commission. The rules of all the various denominations recognize this fact. Our own law is clear. If a minister of another Church desires to unite with us, he has no authority to preach or to administer the sacraments

until the Church, by the Conference, has acted in his case. His previous position may be accepted as proof of certain general qualifications ; a second laying on of hands may not be had ; but he cannot perform the office of an elder among us until the Conference has voted on his case, in precisely the same manner in which a vote is taken in the election of our own elders. In a word, he is not a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church till he is constituted such by regular Church action.

Thus every secession and schism, whether involving one man only or more, of necessity vacates all derived authority. As in civil affairs, when a colony repudiates the rule of the mother country and declares its independence, all commissions given by the home government become void, and the entire administration must be reconstructed on the new basis, so, when a portion of a Church cuts itself loose from the constituted authorities of that Church and sets up for itself, it abandons the old foundations, and must build its structure anew from the very

bottom. It is logically impossible to repudiate and defy authority and at the same time act under it. The limb is dead the moment it is severed from the body. If there is no true ministerial authority except that which comes through an unbroken clerical succession, then Martin Luther ceased to be a Gospel minister when Leo X. excommunicated him. For the same reason, when the English bishops, in the time of Henry VIII., renounced their allegiance to Rome, and thus forfeited all authority derived from Rome, they ceased to be valid ministers of the Church of God. If there exists nowhere the right to organize anew—if the pastoral office and the Church itself are absolutely traditional—then there is only one true Church organization, and all who have separated themselves from her are schismatics. Thus the theory of the successionists leads logically to Rome, and we reject it as unscriptural and irrational.

But if we reject the extravagant claims of Rome, as well as the equally illogical and unscriptural notions of her feeble imitators,

the question returns, What is the true nature of ordination?

Where matters are in a normal condition, ordination is the inauguration, the formal induction into office, of those whom the Church, in the exercise of her godly judgment, has called to the work of the ministry. There is no occasion for speaking lightly of these formalities. There is scriptural precedent for them. There is historical precedent from the earliest ages of the Church. They are right and proper. They have significance and value. They were of special importance when the press did not exist to give publicity to Church action, and to furnish a swift and reliable means of information to the general community. It is right, in our own day, that the minister elect should be solemnly reminded, in the presence of the Church, of the nature of the holy office to which he is called; that he should take upon him publicly the holy vows which bind him to perform his duty faithfully and in the fear of the Lord; and that he should be set forth before the peo-

ple as one who, in the judgment of the Church, is divinely called to the work. Nevertheless, it is the election, and not the solemn forms of inauguration, which confers the office.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, in the 22d Article of Religion, affirms that "it is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word," and that "every particular Church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification." If the Church should so order, every deacon, elder, or bishop would be fully empowered to perform the duties of his office the very moment his election is announced, without any formal induction whatever.

It is curious to observe how the theories and the customs prevalent in civil affairs differ from what, in cases certainly some-

what analogous, have grown—partly, we suspect, from the craft and partly from the superstitions of men—to be the idea and the custom in certain sections of the Church. The old maxim that “the king never dies,” is based on the principle that the throne is never vacant, the son becoming king, without any ceremony whatever, the very moment his royal father breathes his last. The splendors and stately forms of coronation day may be proper and right, but they do not confer sovereignty. They merely proclaim the fact already existing. The Constitution of the United States demands that the President, before he enters upon the duties of his office, shall take an oath to perform those duties faithfully, but it prescribes nothing further in the way of a formal inauguration. The oath, taken in private, before any justice of the peace, would satisfy the terms of the Constitution. And if this requirement be duly complied with, the President elect becomes, on the fourth of March, President in fact, though no man should see him that day save the magistrate.

Sometimes, however, even in the Church, men have the courage to look beyond custom, and rely on first principles. The English Wesleyans, for many years after the death of Mr. Wesley, constituted elders by simple election. And as late as 1851, George Piercey, a Wesleyan local preacher, not waiting to be sent by any society, went to China, and on his own responsibility began the work of a missionary. The work of the Lord prospered in his hands. Souls were converted, and the nucleus of a native Church was formed. The Conference at home, hearing of his efficiency and success, adopted him and his mission, elected him an elder in the Wesleyan body, and commissioned him by letter, investing him thus with full power to perform all the duties of the sacred office. Their action was wholly right and valid. His election conferred the office; and the formal letter which informed him of the action had in his case was valid evidence of his authority.

This idea is not altogether new. In the year 1547 sundry questions were propounded

to Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, among them this: "Whether in the New Testament be required any consecration of a bishop or priest, or only appointing to the office be sufficient?" His deliberate answer was: "He that is appointed to be a bishop or a priest needeth no consecration by the Scripture, for election or appointing thereto is sufficient." Dr. White, afterward bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, in his volume entitled "The Case of the Episcopal Church Considered," argues strongly in favor of measures which would have been allowable and valid only on the principle that a man duly elected to the episcopacy is a true bishop whether ordained or not.

At the close of the war of independence the clergy and the people of the American Episcopal Churches desired greatly to form a complete ecclesiastical organization, but how they were to do it was by no means clear. They had no bishop, and, as matters then stood, there was no way in which they could obtain one from the mother Church.

An act of Parliament prohibited the English bishops from ordaining any bishop, elder, or deacon, unless the candidate took an oath of allegiance to the king of England, both as a temporal sovereign and the head of the Church. This fatally embarrassed the case. In this dilemma Dr. White proposed the election of a permanent president of the Episcopal Convention, who should ordain deacons and elders, and thus supply the Churches with ministers, "without waiting," as he expressed it, "for the succession." He did not forget, however, Paul's exhortation to *comfort the feeble minded*; and he therefore adds the suggestion, that if at any future time the succession should be obtained, "any supposed imperfection of the intermediate ordinations might, if it were judged proper, be supplied without acknowledging their nullity by a conditional ordination resembling that of conditional baptism in the liturgy." To lend additional strength to his project he states that it was an expedient once proposed by Archbishop Tillottson, and Bishops Patrick, Stillingfleet, and others,

and that it had been actually practiced in Ireland by Archbishop Bramhall.

Dr. White here proposes to do precisely what Mr. Wesley did in the case of Dr. Coke, that is, to constitute a true bishop, and yet, for prudential reasons, withhold from him the official title. Dr. White's "president," like Mr. Wesley's "superintendent," was to perform all the duties of the episcopal office. In regard to irregularity, as the successionists would regard it, it is difficult to say which bears the palm, Mr. Wesley, who being himself only a presbyter proceeded to ordain his bishop, or Dr. White, who proposed that his bishop should proceed to act without being ordained to his office. The fact is, both were right; yet both hesitated to follow their own logic to its inevitable conclusion. Wesley would have done well to call Dr. Coke a bishop, as he certainly became such when accepted by the Conference. Dr. White and his fellow-presbyters had a scriptural right to elect a bishop, and ordain him with their own hands. They had historic precedent in the

example of the ancient Church of Alexandria, where, for more than two centuries, the same presbyters who elected the bishop ordained him to office. The power to confer office implies of necessity the power to induct into office.

Dr. White's project did not meet with favor; on the contrary, it was determined to apply to foreign Churches for ecclesiastical authority to establish an American Church. Sundry young men were sent to England to secure ordination; but the Archbishop of Canterbury very properly decided that he had no authority to ordain any man who declined to take the oath of allegiance, and to acknowledge the king of England as the head of the Church. They then made inquiries in France whether any one there, Catholic or Protestant, could be found to perform the all-important ceremony, but failed in the search. The whole affair is a spectacle of pitiable human weakness. No English bishop could impart authority of any kind in an American organization which had been wholly severed from the English

Church. There was no more fitness in the inauguration of an American bishop or presbyter by foreign hands than in the inauguration of an American president or governor by the same agency. The same authority which elects must induct into office.

How solemnly men sometimes cast anchor in a great truth, and then, with equal solemnity, cut their cables and go drifting down the tide. In May, 1784, the leading clergy and laymen of the Episcopal Churches met in Philadelphia, and with all formality laid down certain "fundamental principles," as the Convention termed them. Dr. White presided over the deliberations. It was resolved—

"1. That the Episcopal Church of these States is, and ought to be, independent of all foreign authority, ecclesiastical or civil.

"2. That it hath, and ought to have, in common with all other religious societies, full and exclusive power to regulate the concerns of its own communion."—*Wilson's Life of Bishop White*, p. 99.

Who would imagine, after the enunciation of solid truths like these, that Dr. White would be found on his way to England to ask an English bishop to give him authority to perform the duties of the episcopal office to which he had been elected by his brethren? The principles which determine the case are clear, and of easy application. The Church of England is a State Church. The laws of the realm demand that every candidate for orders shall take a solemn oath of allegiance to the English sovereign. Consequently, when the American colonies became independent of the mother country, it was impossible for the Episcopal Churches in this country to remain a part of the Church of England. By a series of events, which the Episcopalians of the United States were certainly entitled to regard as providential, they had been totally and forever severed from the jurisdiction of the mother Church. Having no authority whatever in the American Church, English bishops could bestow none. Dr. White had been duly elected to his office, and there-

fore had the essential element of a valid title to it. The presbyters of the American Episcopal Churches ought to have recognized the rights which their independent position gave them, and to have ordained their bishop with their own hands. Thus the Churches would not have been compelled to wait, Bishop White would have escaped a useless voyage, and the British Parliament would not have been put to the trouble of framing a special law permitting the omission of the oath of allegiance in this particular case.

It seems marvelous that the mere ceremony of induction into office should be so magnified out of all due proportion. Still, as we look back over the past, we find that three several agencies have been at work to produce this preposterous result. First, the tendency of the Church, especially in times of general ignorance and spiritual declension, to attach undue importance to mere externals; secondly, the ambition of men who have found that their innate love of power and place can be gratified in the

Church as well as in the State, and who set themselves on high by pretending that divine grace flows only in one channel, and that they are the sole custodians and dispensers thereof; thirdly, the unscrupulous policy of civil rulers, who have seized upon the Church and made it the instrument of their state-craft, violating its rights, stripping it of its spiritual power, and sacrificing to their own unworthy uses its honor and saving value among men. When a king or emperor has laid hands on the Church with this intent, we might naturally expect that the ecclesiastics who weakly submit to be his tools would seek to cover their shame and maintain their place before the people by claiming to possess all manner of ghostly powers and privileges, and thus divert attention from what they have really lost by ostentatiously pretending to possess what they never had.

Such, in a degree, is the present condition of the Church of England. When Henry VIII. began his reign, England was but a province of the ecclesiastical empire of

Rome. When he declared himself and his people independent of the pope, a servile Parliament by law conferred upon Henry the title of "the only supreme head of the Church of England upon earth," and thus placed the Church at the feet of the State. There it remains to this day. The most important and vital of Church powers, the selection of the chief ministers, is in the hands of the State. This is a usurpation and an outrage. The bishops of the English Church lack the most essential outward element of a true episcopacy—a scriptural election to the office. Where Rome has full sway we reject her authority as without solid foundation; but thus much at all events can be said in her favor, the professed head of the Church is one of her clergy. The English Church is, in its government, an ecclesiastical monstrosity. It is popery with a lay pope, and at the present time a female pope at that. Whoever can find in the New Testament a basis for such a form of organization must possess sharp eyes. We do not say, that because

of this usurpation of unscriptural power by the State, the Church has ceased to be a part of the true Church of God. We are certainly tempted to feel that those who plume themselves on a "succession" derived from such sources must be endowed with intellects which are easily satisfied, or a vanity which is easily inflated. The State wrongs and humiliates the Church when it forcibly seizes upon it and makes it the tool of a corrupt government, or the prop of a weak one, or when it seeks to avail itself of the moral weight and strength of the Church to anchor itself amid the adverse currents and the driving storms which it fears. No wonder that certain writers make so much noise and pother about ordinations, as if the whole question is determined not by a valid election, but by the laying on of this or that pair of hands. The shame of the slavery to which the State subjects the Church cannot be thus hidden.

In comparing the Church of England with the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is curious to observe how the weakness of the one

and the strength of the other on this vital point comes to the surface in unexpected places. Our law declares that a bishop is to be constituted by two things—election by the General Conference, and consecration by bishops or elders. In ordaining a bishop the one conducting the service is directed to say, “The Lord pour upon thee the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God, *now committed unto thee by the authority of the Church through the imposition of our hands,*” etc. In the English ritual the archbishop, at a certain stage of the ceremonies, demands that the queen’s mandate for the consecration be produced and read. He then administers the oath acknowledging the queen as the supreme earthly head of the Church, and after certain other preliminaries, lays his hands upon the head of the candidate, saying, “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God, *now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands,*” etc. The two rituals show on the very surface that in the one case the

bishop becomes such by the choice of the Church, and that in the other his authority rests upon another foundation, to wit, the will of a female member of the Church. It may not be good sense nor good Scripture to pretend that a valid ordination is every thing, and a valid election nothing; but under certain circumstances it may be good strategy. And yet to say that there can be no true minister unless there is an unbroken succession of ordinations from the days of the apostles, is as absurd as to say that there can be no true friendship in modern times unless there has been an unbroken line of hand-shakings from Damon and Pythias. No shadow of doubt rests upon the validity of the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. At all events, we can never for one moment admit the superior claims of those who were never elected to office in a scriptural, valid way, even if episcopal hands sufficient in number to thatch a cathedral have been laid upon their heads.

Another question, somewhat discussed among us of late, is: Who ought to be set

apart by the imposition of hands? It is contended that we have in the Methodist Episcopal Church two orders and one office, while certain other Churches hold that there must be of necessity three orders; and that, if bishops and elders are the same in order, we are not consistent when we induct the bishop into office by a third laying on of hands, whether we term the rite a third ordination, or, following the example of the Protestant Episcopal and the Romish Churches, call it a consecration.

On entering upon this inquiry, the first thing to settle is the meaning of the terms which belong to the question. What is an order? What is an office?

Our ritual makes no distinction between these terms. It speaks of "the office and work of a bishop," and in exactly the same words names "the office and work" of an elder. It also names "the office of a deacon." Thus it appears from the words used in the most significant and solemn part of the ordination service, that we have not one office only, but three, in our ministry.

But how many "orders" have we? In the practical working of our system we distribute the active ministry into a number of classes: 1. Local preachers; 2. Local deacons; 3. Local elders; 4. Unordained preachers on trial in the conference; 5. Itinerant deacons; 6. Itinerant elders; 7. Presiding elders; 8. Bishops; 9. Supernumerary deacons; 10. Supernumerary elders. These classes are all distinct, the duties and powers of each being defined in the Discipline of the Church. No man can enter any one class, or pass from one to another, except by the formal action of the proper authorities. On examining the duties, powers, and privileges thus assigned we find them divisible into two classes—the temporary and the permanent. The unordained local preacher is licensed for one year only, and on the expiration of that period his license must be renewed or he ceases to be a local preacher. The preacher on trial in the conference is received for one year only, and at the end of the year new action is taken by the conference. The presiding

elder is appointed for only one year. In these cases duties are assigned for a limited period named in the law of the Church ; but when we elect to the office of a deacon, an elder or a bishop, we assign duties and confer powers which we never expect to recall. These three offices are separated from each other by narrow intervals. A deacon can perform every duty which ordinarily belongs to an elder except one ; that is, he cannot conduct the service in the administration of the Lord's Supper, although he may assist the elder therein. The bishops preside in the conferences, decide questions of law, appoint the preachers, and perform the rites of ordination and consecration ; but if from any cause an annual conference is compelled to hold its session without the presence of a bishop, an elder, appointed by the absent bishop or elected by the conference, presides, decides law questions, and appoints the preachers. If, by death or otherwise, there is no bishop left in the Church, the General Conference may elect one, and the elders consecrate him. Thus an elder may, in cer-

tain cases, perform the highest functions of the episcopal office, and be for the time a true bishop.

By the law of our Church, and by the immemorial usage of the general Church, the question in regard to the holding of solemn inauguration ceremonies is determined by the duration of the tenure of office. A local preacher is licensed for a year only, and enters upon his office without any formal induction. The presiding elder is appointed for a year, and begins his work without inauguration rites of any kind. The elder who is made a temporary bishop by the vote of an annual conference is invested with a short-lived authority; and he, too, enters upon the duties of his position at once without form or ceremony. But a deacon, on becoming such, is invested with certain powers which he holds for life. On his election to the office of an elder he loses nothing of the powers which pertain to him as deacon, but receives certain additional powers. Should he become a bishop he loses no power pertaining to the eldership, but

adds others. Thus in all three cases duties are assigned and powers are bestowed which are not limited to any set period, not liable to be recalled, but are held by a life tenure; and it seems proper to mark with special solemnities the setting apart of men for sacred duties which are to be their life-work.

We hold firmly the conviction that, so far as Church action goes, a valid election is the vital element of a valid ministry; and that if the Church so ordered, the office of deacon could be done away, or elders and bishops, duly elected, could be empowered to enter upon their several duties without any formal induction into office. Nevertheless, the solemn services of ordination and consecration, if not obligatory, are beautiful, impressive, and appropriate, and their continued observance is desirable to the end of time; and if we have more than one ordination it would seem that we ought to have three. In regard to the regular duties of their respective offices, the interval between the deacon and the elder is far less than that between the elder and the bishop. The

functions of the deacon and the elder lie almost in the same plane, and casual observers detect no difference between them. The responsibilities of the bishop involve the interests of so many ministers, churches, and people, and involve them so deeply, as to justify peculiar care in selecting the minister upon whom they are to be laid, and peculiar solemnities in investing him with his sacred office. In this inauguration ceremony it is accordant with Scripture and history that there be hands laid upon the head of the candidate; and to this service the usage of ages applies the term *ordination* or consecration, or the conferring of orders. Thus it appears that while we utterly repudiate all "High-church" notions, we have, by the law of the Church, three offices in our ministry, and by the laws of language we have also three orders, and that the law of the Church and the usage of ages regard the laying on of hands as a regular part of the inauguration service where spiritual office is held by the life tenure.

If this interchange of the words order and

office be deemed confusing and undesirable, it may be avoided by our agreeing to state principles and define terms, thus : That God has established the ministry for the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the oversight of the Church ; that those who are called to this work constitute the order of the ministry ; that in the Methodist Episcopal Church the functions of this ministry are distributed into three principal offices, and that ordination is the solemn induction of the deacon, elder, or bishop elect into an office of the order to which God and the Church have called him.

But *let him that readeth understand.* No low and unworthy views of the Church, nor of the ministry, nor of the obligations of the individual believer to the Church, are logically deducible from the great principles here set forth. The Church is a divine institution. It is intended, not for a day only, but for all time. Like Jerusalem above, it is *a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* Let no man despise it,

for it is *the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* As the solid masonry of the lighthouse lifts on high the bright lamps which send their cheering beams far and wide over the dark and stormy sea, so the Church lifts up the blessed *light of the glorious gospel of Christ.* It is God's instrument for the salvation of men; his messenger to the world, his witness before the world.

In this divinely instituted Church the ministry are a divinely instituted order of men, set apart from secular to holy things. *No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.* It is not an office which may be lightly assumed and as lightly laid aside. The time may indeed come when the Church shall be pervaded with a degree of spiritual life and power unknown in all her past history, when many sons and daughters shall prophesy, and young men see visions, and old men dream dreams; when he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David, and the house of David as the angel of the Lord among

them. But so long as the Church continues to be a Church militant, there will be an order of men who are called of God to devote themselves wholly, and for life, to the work of the ministry.

A true call to the ministry is twofold; a direct call from the great Head of the Church, an indirect call through the Church. A true minister of Christ feels the obligation, and can say *Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.* The Church, recognizing the divine call in the gifts, graces, and spiritual usefulness of the candidate, elects him to his holy office, and with appropriate, solemn services inducts him into it.

Nor is membership in the Church of God a thing to be lightly esteemed. To describe the Church as simply a voluntary association is to convey a little valuable truth and a fatal error. It is, indeed, a voluntary association, so far as man's right to force members into it extends. It is usurpation and outrage as well as folly to try to make men Christians by legal pains and penalties. Such measures make hypocrites. There

must *first be a willing mind*. Each must enter of his own free-will, repenting, believing, surrendering all to God. If he departs from the faith and grows anxious to repudiate his obligations, the Church has no right to try to hold him by force and violence, against his own consent.

Nevertheless, whether a Christian shall remain alone or seek the society of his fellow-Christians, is not a matter which God leaves optional with the individual. The convert is religiously bound to solicit reception into the fold. Not only is it the instinctive prompting of the renewed to desire the fellowship of kindred souls, but the safety and the progress of the convert, the moral beauty and power of his new life, depend largely upon his uniting in firm concord with those of *like precious faith*.

In order to maintain the ordinances of religion, and to carry on vigorously its evangelical enterprises and benevolent operations, the Church needs to be an organization, each member of which shall stand in his lot and bear his share of the common respon-

sibility. If one true child of God is at liberty to stand aloof from duty so may another, so may all, and thus the Church itself dissolve and disappear. No, *the Church of the living God* is not a loose association with which men may play fast and loose as their moods and caprices prompt, but a body *fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.*



CHAPTER III.

THE ITINERANCY—THE BRIGHT SIDE.

Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.
MARK xvi, 15.

THE most striking feature of the Methodist system is the peculiar method in which it provides for the annual redistribution of ministerial service. The theory which underlies the whole is that a compact and comprehensive organization clothes the Church with solid strength, gives unity to its aims and vigor to its enterprises, and imparts the highest degree of practical efficiency; that the best intelligence of the Church shall be invoked to take a broad view of the field, plan carefully the Gospel campaign, and lead on the militant host in the holy war; and that pastors and people, in the fear of the Lord, and moved by ardent love for souls, freely consent to become

parts of an extended scheme of evangelism, cheerfully occupying the places, and faithfully performing the duties assigned them. A true itinerant ministry resembles a band of patriots who, in time of national peril, voluntarily enter the ranks, and subject themselves to a rigid discipline, because only in this way the citizen becomes the soldier, and the full strength of the army makes itself felt in the field. The power to direct is confided to the few chosen to bear the vast burden of responsibility, and all the resources of the Church are placed in their hands to be wielded for the glory of God and the salvation of men. And as the general in command of the patriot force forms his line of battle wisely and with deliberation, massing men here, scattering them there; posting here his veterans, yonder the recruits; at this point the officer who delights to sweep like a whirlwind upon the enemy, at that the one who has been tried in long and stubborn contests, and stands like a rock amid the dashing waves of battle; so the chiefs of the spiritual force must know their men

and the work to be done, and place each division and each man where they will be equal to the post assigned them, and accomplish most for God and the world.

This plan is certainly not unlike the divine original, as seen in apostolic times. The commission of the first preachers of the Gospel was, *Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.* For three years the little band of disciples had been constant companions of Christ. They heard the words, they saw the deeds, they marked the whole spirit of the great Teacher. Daily, by precept and example, as well as by the inward working of the power of God, they were trained in the principles, the practice, and the experience of the new life.

At last the hour came when the Master was to leave them. He gave them his final words of command and admonition. He laid before them their work. He mapped out the field in which they were to labor. He cheered their hearts with the promise that he would be with them to the end of the world. And then, lifting up his hands,

he blessed them, and it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven. With the glory of that vision before their eyes, the joy of that hour warm in their hearts, they went forth and preached every-where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.

Here we have, therefore, the original commission. The Church was organized as a missionary agency. God did not set up the truth in some chosen place, like a statue upon its pedestal, and bid the nations come from far and gaze upon it. The Gospel was not to be a lifeless similitude of beauty and strength, but rather a living, breathing messenger of grace, going forth in search of the lost, traversing the whole world in its benevolent mission.

The work of the Church remains the same to-day as at the beginning. It is still to go forth, unwearied in labor, disheartened by no difficulties, dismayed by no danger. The field is still the world. Whithersoever man has wandered, thither the voice of mercy

must follow; wherever immortal souls are found, there the tidings of peace are to be proclaimed.

No man sent of God into fields "white to the harvest" ever began his work in truer apostolic style than did John Wesley and the bands of earnest co-laborers whom he summoned to his aid, both in England and America. Without wealth, without honor, at the beginning without even an organization for mutual defense and support—often not only uninvited, but in defiance of fierce opposition—they went forth to tell the story of the Christ, trusting in Providence for the bread of the day and for shelter at night. The fathers of American Methodism, as well as their English co-workers, feared neither hunger nor thirst, nor cold nor heat, nor toil nor danger. They were endowed with holy courage and burning zeal. They were constantly listening for the opening of new doors—constantly trying to push into the regions beyond. The itinerant often left the conference with directions to go into a given part of the country and break up

new ground ; to lay out a circuit where none of his brethren had ever preceded him. Sometimes he knew not where he should preach his first sermon or see the first friendly face ; and he felt as strange as did Columbus on his first voyage of discovery when he left the track of other navigators, and, looking no more to the shores familiar to his eyes, but to his compass and the stars, boldly pushed into unknown seas. Proclaiming his errand as he journeyed along, the preacher accepted an invitation to hold service anywhere—in school-house, dwelling, or barn—and at the close of his sermon offered to come again in four or six weeks if the people desired it. Thus the country was explored and the circuit was formed. Where four or five converts were found in any one neighborhood they were organized as a class, and a leader was appointed with directions to meet the little flock once a week in the absence of the preacher. As converts multiplied and strength increased churches were built, and the society gained permanence and position in the community.

Thus by the force of accidental circumstances, as the world would say, but providentially, as we believe, grew up the Methodist itinerancy, with its constant changes and tireless energy. That itinerancy has been, and still remains, a power in the world. We do not claim for it that it has no drawbacks, or that it combines, in itself, all the advantages of all other systems of ministerial labor. We do claim for it that in the past it has wrought wonders; and that it is still a good and wise arrangement, possessing elements of efficiency and excellence which the Church cannot afford to lose.

1. Our system secures to each Church a pastor at all times. We do not wish to deal in unneighborly comparisons, yet we point to the fact that there are in our own land large and influential bodies of Christians who leave the congregations and the ministers individually to manage for themselves; who agree that a "settled pastorate" is better than any itinerant system, and yet their annual reports show that from year to year nearly one half of their Churches are

without settled pastors, and dependent on temporary supplies. For this state of things there must be a cause, and what is it? Is it because they find it so difficult to make permanent arrangements? or is it because there is little desire for permanence? One or both of these reasons must lie at the foundation of the evil. The fatal fact cited is itself sufficient to offset all the defects of the itinerancy.

Our Churches, on the other hand, all have pastors. The weakest society is provided for as certainly as the strongest, and all have pastors all the while. There are no exceptions, save under circumstances for which no system can provide, as in the case of the death of the pastor. When a minister is assigned to a Church he remains its pastor till the appointed officer rises at the close of the session of conference and announces a new distribution of labor, and then the same hour that ends his pastorate installs his successor.

2. The itinerancy secures for the pastor a fair degree of independence before his

people, enabling him to *speak boldly, as he ought to speak.*

Entire independence on either side is not good. This is one of the evils of State Churches. When the Government seeks to control the Church the object sought is not the good of the Church. It is rather a politic move on the part of the "powers that be," who seek to prop their thrones by enlisting the priesthood of the country in their favor. The religious leaders even of idolaters are recognized as wielding great influence among the people. Tyrants and timid rulers, apprehensive of revolt and revolution, aim to fortify themselves by making the ministry creatures of their own, bound to the throne by the principle that *the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.* Consequently, the conditions on which the State pastors hold their places refer to the head of the State rather than the great Head of the Church, and loyalty is of more importance to them than piety. Having a legal claim on the people for their salary, and at the same time not amenable to the

people for the manner in which they do their duty, there is a dangerous tendency to ease and worldliness, and to be satisfied with a cold performance of the services prescribed by the law. The pastor is not only sufficiently independent of his people to preach the whole truth boldly if he will, but to tempt him to be indifferent whether he preaches it at all.

Turning to the congregational plan of Church government, we find that the pastor is too much in the power of the people. If, indeed, he is a man of uncommon acceptability, he may feel at his ease. But take an average man. Suppose that he is well pleased with his position, hopes to retain it, and determines to retain it as long as possible. We will also imagine him a little past his prime, and beginning to suspect that the younger portions of his flock regard him as an old man. There is an influential man in his Church who has a large circle of relatives and friends, and around whom a strong party can easily be gathered; this man is pursuing a course detrimental to

religion and will not be reproved. Half a score of worldly pew-holders take offense at the pastor's plain-dealing sermons, and threaten to secede if he will not cease from his rebukes, and content himself with "preaching the Gospel." The pastor may be poor, and have a dependent family, and a loss of his present position will be well-nigh fatal to him. His years, his moderate abilities, will render it a hard thing for him to find a new charge, and so he is in a strait between duty to souls and duty to those dependent upon him; and there is danger that in the conflict conscience will suffer. If he already knows that his hold upon his people is slender, the temptation is stronger, and the peril to conscience greater.

On the itinerant plan things are more equal. To be removed at the end of one year is not of necessity embarrassing to the pastor. In the process of disciplining the unruly he may provoke an opposition which will render his longer stay unpleasant to him; but if he has done his work wisely and well, he goes his way unharmed, and leaves

a clear field for his successor. If those who are provoked by his faithfulness hold the purse, and cut off his supplies, the temporary lack may be made up by future abundance. Thus the unfair and unsafe dependence of the congregational plan is avoided, as well as the equally unsafe independence of the State Church system. Tested by practical results, in outspoken boldness of reproof of popular sins and vices, as slavery and the use of intoxicating drinks, we are not ashamed to compare the itinerants of the Methodist Episcopal Church with the ministry of any other denomination in the land. And if it is evident that in these things we have excelled others, it may be candid as well as modest for us to say that the difference is perhaps more due to our better system of ministerial labor than to clearer reason and deeper piety. Entire independence of the people, and entire dependence upon them, are both evils. The itinerant system is free from both extremes, and therefore works to the advantage of the pastor, who is bound to *declare all the*

counsel of God, and of the people, who need all that counsel.

3. The itinerancy furnishes the means of securing a change of pastors without inflicting dishonor or injustice.

From a want of adaptation, or from circumstances which neither the pastor nor the people can control, it may be expedient that he should leave his present field of labor. Where the congregational plan obtains, it is difficult to effect the change. To canvass the Church, inquiring who would like to have the minister resign, is an ungracious business, very apt to damage those engaged in it. To oust the pastor often destroys the unity of the Church, and separates chief friends. Even where there is a clear and strong conviction among the people that a change is demanded for the good of the cause, there is often a resolute minority who resist to the last, and make the process disastrous. A quarrel over the removal of the old pastor is generally the precursor of numberless others in securing a new one. For these reasons, and more,

the considerate members of the Church seek a change only when it becomes evident, not only that their best exertions put forth steadily, year after year, have failed to achieve success under the present arrangement, but also that present evils are so great as to warrant incurring the risks involved in the attempt to secure a change.

If the pastor is a popular man, and he seeks the change, people are prone to talk it over, and try to conjecture his motives. They wonder whether he is becoming mercenary, and is aiming at a higher salary elsewhere ; or whether he is justified in leaving his people by some lack of cordiality, harmony, or liberality on their part.

If the people seek the change, it can hardly fail to be construed as a reflection on the minister, his talents, his piety, his fitness, or something else. The process may be conducted with all delicacy and kindness of speech. They may declare that they respect the good brother; and will always continue to do so ; that they hope and fervently pray that he may be very useful and

happy in some new field. Nevertheless, after all these soft words, there remains the palpable fact, that for some reason, good or bad, through some fault or some misfortune, he has failed to secure or retain the affections of his people, and to render his ministrations generally acceptable. Consequently he goes forth to the ecclesiastical market-place with a suspicious mark upon him. When the congregation of a Church seeking a pastor see in the pulpit a candidate who has evidently been some time in the ministry, they instinctively ask, "Who is he? Where has he been? *Why does he not stay there?*" There is a prejudice against men who cannot keep their places. When the congregation seek a new pastor, therefore, they generally prefer a young man who has never been settled, or one who is now settled over some little Church who would gladly keep him if they could, but who cannot bid very high for his services. This is not because age and experience are not respected, but because there is a fear that the man who has lost his Church is not the right

man ; a fear that the causes which effected past changes may continue to operate.

Now, under all modes of distributing ministerial labor, there will be cases of failure. If a man lacks the elements of acceptability and usefulness, there is nothing but failure for him. One system may keep him afloat a little longer than another, but sooner or later he will go to the bottom. Still, circumstances may render a change of location expedient where there is no fault in the minister. He may unconsciously come in collision with inveterate local prejudices, or be made, against his will, a bone of contention between warring factions in the Church. He may find cases of unfaithfulness and inconsistency among his people, and set himself resolutely to the work of reforming abuses. He may succeed, and render the Church far purer and stronger than before, and yet, in the process of applying discipline, incur in certain quarters the charge of harshness. Perhaps even those whom he saves from ruinous error may feel cool toward him, just as convales-

cent lunatics for a time indulge unkind feelings toward the skillful physician who has brought them to their senses.

But whether it be through misfortune or fault, removals and changes do sometimes become necessary. On the congregational plan, there must be a debate and a canvassing of opinions ; reasons are urged on this side and on that, and when the discussion is once fairly inaugurated evil is almost inevitable. The pastor may be thrust out of his place under circumstances which hinder him in securing another, and send him away wounded in heart and in reputation ; or he may stave off the crisis for the time, and remain in his Church ; but in either case there is a minority who are sore and dissatisfied. The change, however desirable, can hardly be secured without loss of reputation and of friendship.

Here, then, is one of the advantages of our itinerant system : a change, where expedient, can be effected quietly, and without inflicting needless injury on minister or people. If there be a real fault in the pas-

tor, the authorities may administer due counsel, and then, placing him in a new location, give him a new trial, and prevent his one error from proving fatal to his usefulness and happiness. If the people are in the wrong, they too can be admonished and begin again, wiser by sad experience.

4. The itinerant system gives each church the benefit of the varied endowments of many ministers.

Very few men combine in themselves all the qualifications desirable in a minister. Most men are one-sided in native character, one-sided in acquirement, one-sided by habit. The learning which demands the attention of him who would be *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*, spreads out into a field of infinite extent; and no man is likely to cultivate the whole of it with the same care and success. Thus there is really a division of labor. Some become powerful in stirring the conscience of the sinner. The power of others is felt most in the Church, leading believers on to a higher spirituality and a deeper experience. Others still train the

zeal of the Church, and rouse all around them to active labors in the cause of God. One man is by nature and by habit a reasoner, another a poet, a third an impassioned declaimer. One is sure to convince the intellect; another is equally sure to touch the heart. One is a *son of thunder*, another a *son of consolation*. And because of these varied gifts, acquirements, temperaments, every minister is peculiarly fitted to reach a certain class of mind and heart among the people. The rude strength of one will gain the attention of some who are neither attracted nor impressed by the gentle modes of approach which win others. The gravity and solemnity which secure the confidence of the aged may frighten children, and be less attractive to hopeful minds of all ages than would a more cheerful type of character and manners.

Is it asked which of these is good and desirable? We answer, *all*. All these varieties of mental structure and acquirement are good each in the place and for the purpose for which God intended it. They are like

the planes, the chisels, the saws, in a complete chest of tools, no two alike, because there are so many kinds of work to be done. They are like the multiplied pipes of an organ, different, yet all needed for the perfection of the harmony. The itinerant system gives each congregation the use of the whole set of instruments. Every class of mind is addressed, in its turn, by the one most likely to reach it. Thus the logical and the poetic, the sensitive, the grave, and the gay, the sad and the hopeful, are appealed to appropriately and powerfully. Thus the gray-haired servant of God, the heedless youth, the mature man, and the laughing child, recognize the messenger sent especially to them. Thus the minister who is strong in one part of theology gives way to a successor equally strong in another; and in time the Church receives the whole. Thus the Church hears doctrine, history, prophecy, the Gospel and the law, the whole circle of divine truth, and learns to be hopeful and fearful, active and meditative, spiritual and practical, devotional and conscientious, and

is rounded into completeness of Christian knowledge and character.

5. The itinerancy keeps ministers and people in vigorous action. There is no place for dull monotony to drag its slow length along. Our rapid changes rouse the Churches and keep them awake. Every new distribution of ministerial labor inaugurates new campaigns against sin and error, and summons the sacramental host to the battle. With a new leader, fresh courage and hope spring up, and the sinews of effort are strung anew. The pastor, too, feels the quickening impulse. Every change of his field of action puts him again on trial. Whatever the past may have been, however solid his reputation and acceptable his ministry, he feels, when he begins his labors in his new charge, that here he has a weighty responsibility to meet, a work to do, and a name to win. He looks upon new faces, and feels that to these new hearers his sermons, his exhortations, all the varied mental accumulations of the years that are gone, are fresh, have the charm of novelty, and are,

therefore, doubly interesting and impressive. He is brought into communion with immortal souls who a little while ago were strangers to him, and from whom the recurring changes of the system will soon remove him, perhaps forever. What he does must be done quickly. The memory of former successes remains to cheer him to effort. He is away from the scene of any former defeat which he may have suffered, and remembers only that he may be warned. He is extricated from any difficulties into which he may have been hastily or heedlessly drawn elsewhere, and is free to put forth his best energies for the sake of his divine Master and the souls committed to his hands. Thus his removal to a new field of labor is as the renewing of his divine call to the ministry, his commission to preach the blessed Gospel of peace.

Moreover, the itinerant system renders available the whole strength of the ministry. The appointing power looks over the entire field, sees what needs to be done, and knows where to find the man to do it. This gives

the operations of the Church a unity, a celerity, and a force attainable under no other plan of organization.

The itinerancy, in many important respects, benefits the minister.

1. It secures to him a pastorate so long as he is able to work effectively in the Gospel field.

Under other systems, when the young man who believes that he is called of God to preach his word has completed his preparatory studies, the next thing is to secure a place in which to begin the good work. This gives rise to what is called "candidating," that is, traveling in search of a call, and preaching specimen sermons in vacant churches. We are aware that men of extraordinary power have little to fear under any system; but to diffident young men, trembling under a sense of their inexperience, and deeply impressed with a view of the solemn nature of their mission, this candidating must be a painful if not a humiliating process. Each aspirant knows that just in proportion to the desirableness of the

place will be the numbers and eagerness of rivals, and the danger that, whoever wins, there will be a minority who favor some other candidate, and who are disappointed, if not irritated and embittered, by the rejection of their favorite. Every system, as we have said, must be judged by the way it works under ordinary circumstances; and young men of average ability are very uneasy, if not unhappy, while undergoing this advertising process in reference to their first settlement.

But these difficulties, so annoying to a diffident young man, become really distressing in the case of a minister of only average attractiveness, with a dependent family, and a little past middle life, who finds himself under the necessity of securing a new pastoral charge. His years are not in his favor. The great majority of any ordinary congregation are younger than he, and naturally prefer a pastor nearer their own age. The fact that he has left his former Church, explain it as he will, creates the suspicion that there has been a fault or a failure some-

where; and thus while he is preaching his trial discourse his hearers are coldly criticising the man and his sermon, the matter and the manner, and trying to discover something which will account for his leaving his people. He knows all this, and prays, and trembles under the weight. The dread of this keeps many a man from leaving a Church where he is conscious that his acceptability is on the wane, and where he sees little hope of usefulness or of happiness. He fears that if he cannot stay where he is, he will not easily find another place. And if he does find another Church, it may be after an interval of many months; and in the meantime he has neither home, nor salary, nor employment, and debt is accumulating at a fearful rate. These things lead many a minister to hold on where he is, though he knows that his stay is as annoying to the people as it is painful to him. Thus, cruel as they are, he bears the ills he has, rather than "fly to those he knows not of."

To a sensitive mind there must be something appalling in this candidating process,

the evils of which have increased immeasurably within the last few years. If the place left vacant is at all desirable, the rush of eager expectants is astonishing. I have heard of Churches which have spent six or eight months trying to select a pastor, and during that space of time have not been able to give each of the candidates a chance to preach a single sermon, but have been compelled to refuse even to hear many who presented themselves as applicants for the vacant pulpit.

Our system, on the contrary, secures a field for every laborer as long as life and health to labor are given him of God. Our young men have, indeed, a term of probation assigned them at the beginning; and all through life there is constant inquiry in regard to the minister's acceptability and usefulness, and he must take a higher or lower level, as he proves to be. Nevertheless, if the preacher be able to perform acceptable labor at all, the Church places him, without anxiety or loss on his part, in that portion of the field where, in the judgment of those

on whom devolves this responsibility, he may best serve the cause of God. This feature of our economy is certainly worth something both to ministers and people, as it saves them both from some unpleasant and unprofitable things.

2. The itinerancy makes the minister not wholly dependent on the favor of the people. Complete independence and entire dependence are equally undesirable, and apt to be detrimental, as we have shown in another place. We contend that in this the itinerancy attains the just middle ground, making the minister in a degree amenable to his people, yet not compelling him to flatter their weakness and touch gently their sins, or be set adrift upon a stream which has swept many a one out of the active ministry.

3. The itinerancy permits the minister to give his time and mental force to the preparation of a comparatively small number of sermons, and is, therefore, favorable to thorough preparation for the pulpit.

This may seem to some a small matter; but let us look at it. The idea of the un-

thinking hearer is that he who preaches *ex tempore*, as it is called, stands up before his audience, and utters what occurs to him at the moment just as it occurs; that he who uses notes, more or less voluminous, sits down at some odd hour, when he happens to have nothing else to do, and writes at his ease all he wants without care or effort. We know that able sermons have been preached at very short notice; but we are also persuaded that it is presumption in any man to expect to be uniformly acceptable and useful without much prayer, much reading and thinking, much hard work. He who relies upon his ready utterance may do well when wind and tide are in his favor; but the student and thinker alone is reliable at all times. To prepare good sermons which really *feed the flock of God*, to do this month after month ably, acceptably, with no signs of flagging either in the speaker or the hearers, is no small thing. A sermon that is uttered in thirty minutes may contain the condensed results of days of earnest, prayerful research. If the preacher addresses the same people

from year to year, how great the labor of keeping up the supply of new material. If he remains many years, how much strong argument, beautiful illustration, and fervent appeal, become useless after a single utterance. The itinerancy, by rendering it possible to use the same preparations more than once, gives time for thorough study. He who must prepare his two sermons a week has more than he ought to do. He will work in haste, and seldom produce a discourse that seems to his own mind complete. He knows that no man can retain in his memory, in available shape, the mass of ideas, arguments, illustrations sufficient for a ten years' ministry, and so he employs notes in his pulpit labors. This necessitates a ceaseless use of the pen. And a written sermon hastily prepared is apt to be less effective than an extempore discourse. Each mode has its advantages. The extempore sermon will have more vivacity, more emotional force; the written sermon ought to have more thought, expressed in better language. One has more powder, and the

other more ball; whereas powder and ball are both needed. If, then, the preacher be so afraid of repeating himself, of falling into the use of stereotyped expressions on all occasions, that he is compelled to write his sermons, and is compelled to write hastily, he has the peculiar advantages of neither mode. His notes are hurried up without that weighing, sifting process which alone makes written sermons tolerable; yet they hinder mental and emotional freedom more than if they were carefully studied. His sermon has all the defects to which extempore discourse is liable, unfinished thought, clumsy expression, bad arrangement, without the vivacity and freedom which redeem those defects. To enable a man to do his best in the construction of a sermon, he must have time to study his subject carefully, lay his plans deliberately, and work until he feels that it is done. The itinerancy gives time to do this, and therefore has an advantage over the other system.

We know that, under every plan of ministerial labor, the *hireling* who *careth not*

for the sheep will do his work with a slack hand. In the settled ministry, as it is called, he will put new texts at the head of old manuscripts, or preach as his own the sermons of better men. In the itinerancy, he will repeat the same sermons, without addition or improvement, in each place, as the street musician grinds over before each house all the tunes that his organ plays. Still it is a positive excellence of our system that it permits the minister to spend much labor on a comparatively small number of discourses.

And yet, when we look at it, there is enough to be done to rouse the holy ambition and task the power of any man, however gifted. To preach to the same congregation three years, creditably and usefully, requires three hundred sermons. The strength of most men's ministry, however learned and able, could be given in a much smaller number. Few men take a wider range of topics, or treat them more successfully, than did John Wesley; and his published discourses give, doubtless, not merely

an idea of the style in which he preached, but the substance, the very pith and marrow of his ministry. Yet his two volumes contain only one hundred and forty sermons. The published sermons of Richard Watson, one of the mightiest men of the present century, number only one hundred and twenty-three. The volumes of Dr. Edward Payson, a very prince in Israel, contain ninety-six discourses only, selected from the manuscripts which accumulated during twenty years' labor in the same congregation. When Dr. J. A. Alexander, of Princeton, died, it was deemed expedient to publish but forty-three of his sermons. Dr. Dwight, a man of learning and ability, labored for years preparing a series of discourses that should discuss the whole system of theology with a good degree of minuteness and thoroughness, yet one hundred and seventy-three sermons complete the work. Some men of transcendent power seem to have done their work with a very small number of sermons. George Whitefield was the wonder of the last century ; and the discourses upon which

he relied were twenty-seven in number, some of which he repeated on as many as sixty different occasions. Dr. H. B. Bascom was a marvel of pulpit eloquence and power; yet his principal sermons, as selected by himself, are twelve in number; and these, he assures us, he had been elaborating and preaching twenty-five years. Where is the minister whose literary executors deemed worthy of publication a sufficient number of his sermons to supply a modern pulpit three years? We know that ministers who lived long and wrought hard with their pens, have left behind them whole bales of manuscripts; but a comparatively small number of these embody the substance of the entire mass. The same themes are of necessity discussed over and over again; every idea of importance is repeatedly set forth in its appropriate place, and favorite expressions constantly recur. Where a minister has written a thousand sermons, it is safe to say that four fifths of them are mere repetitions and dilutions of the rest; and could the whole time spent in penning the thousand have been devoted to

the preparation of one third the number, the work would have been done infinitely better. We count it one of the excellencies of our system that it gives time for thorough preparation for the pulpit. Assigning the minister a new field of labor at stated intervals, it makes all his strength available, puts back into the quiver every arrow that he has shot, and bids him shoot it again with new skill and force. By rendering one department of his duty less burdensome, it leaves him more time and energy for others. It gives more opportunity for general reading and for pastoral visiting, and enables him to look after all the interests of the Church. If any lover of ease takes advantage of the itinerancy to live an idle, careless life, belittling mind and soul where he should be growing daily, the woe belongs to him, not to the system which he abuses to his own undoing. Surely no ministers have a better opportunity than ours to gather the materials of effective service.

4. The itinerancy is conducive to health and long life.

The vital forces of a minister settled for many years over the same congregation are subjected to a fearful strain. He must write, write, write. The demand for the weekly sermon is as remorseless as the cry of the horse-leech's daughters. To prepare one thoroughly studied discourse a week for a series of years tries the strongest constitution, as facts, numerous and indisputable, attest. Many *sigh by reason of the bondage*, like Israel under the task-masters of Pharaoh, and not a few break down under the burden. And the very man whose sensitive nature best fits him to attract and interest the multitude; the man whose pulses leap, and whose mind and soul glow with fervor as the argument or the appeal proceeds, lighting the same flame in the heart of the hearer, is the one to whom this strain of never-ending preparation is most painful and most dangerous. The country pastors are safest. They have fewer excitements; Church rivalries are not so pressing; the demands made upon them in the pulpit and out of it are not so numerous. They enjoy

purser air, more sunshine, and have better habits of living. But look at the pastors settled over large city congregations. Every third man is an habitual invalid. The weekly sermon, which must be prepared at all hazard, is the incubus that rests upon them, the vampyre which is draining their veins.

Many a good and able man, gifted with every element of ministerial efficiency, in the various denominations around us, would be more useful, more happy, and live longer, if he could be quietly and honorably transferred to a new field of labor. The change would renew his youth like the eagle's. It would remove the weight which now presses upon brain and heart. It would render available once more the labors of the past—the discourses wrought out with care and fervent supplication for divine aid, which he has preached with acceptance and effect, but which are useless to him now, because he stands in terror of the accusation of having given up study and ceased to write. So he toils on at his desk, with feeble pulse and weary brain, while he knows that among his

papers are the notes of scores of sermons far more likely to impress and move his people than any which, in his jaded condition, he can now produce. Give him a new field, honorably, pleasantly, without the shame of a rupture with the Church which he now serves, or the agonies of candidating for another, and he becomes a new man in soul, body, and spirit. He feels the stimulus of a new auditory where his eye falls upon strange faces, where he is to win new friends and, by the grace of God, new stars for his crown. His body feels the relief, and with his returning physical vigor he prepares, like a *well-instructed scribe*, to *bring forth out of his treasure things new and old*. The Church, too, will feel the stirring power of new ideas, new argument and illustration, new appeals to reason and conscience, new modes of address, and both minister and people go forth to spiritual battle with fresh courage and strength.

5. The itinerancy has advantages over other modes of distributing ministerial labor, in that it provides the means of effect-

ing necessary changes quietly and without doing injury to either minister or people.

These changes are sometimes expedient on the score of health ; sometimes because of a want of adaptation ; sometimes because of outward circumstances, which get awry and cannot be straightened. As we have seen, it is a great advantage to the people to be able to secure new arrangements without open rupture and public debate. We need not occupy space in showing that it also works to the advantage of the minister.



CHAPTER IV.

THE ITINERANCY—THE SHADOWS.

"That which is crooked cannot be made straight : and that which is wanting cannot be numbered."—ECCLES. i, 15.

NO enginery which human ingenuity and skill have contrived, none which is committed to human hands, works perfectly. Man's knowledge is limited ; his wisdom sweeps but a small circle, and even when the plan is of divine origin, the result will be imperfect. So far from being anxious to divert attention from the occasional jars which occur in the working of our enginery, or to cover up points of friction, we prefer to bring them to the light, that every avoidable defect may be remedied, and every invincible evil reduced to its minimum. As has already been intimated, the "settled pastorate," even in the Churches which

advocate it most strongly, is something of a myth, long terms of service being the rare exceptions, and frequent changes the general rule. Compared with the settled ministry of some other Churches, our system has disadvantages which we do not attempt to conceal either from ourselves or others. In the following enumeration of them, however, it must be recollected, from first to last, that we are herein comparing the itinerant system, as it is, with the theoretic permanent pastorate, the ideal of others, not the actual, which, as we have seen, is apt to be quite another thing.

Some features of the itinerancy are not advantageous to the congregation.

1. The people are restricted in the choice of their pastors.

We place this admission on record first, not because it has the weight which some fancy, but because it naturally stands at the beginning of this part of the discussion. There is, in fact, no congregation where even the majority have this matter wholly in their power. In all denominations the

large and wealthy societies have an advantage over others. The weakest and poorest may indeed call any minister whom they choose; but whether he will come or not is another question. Nor are we to deem a man who has his preferences a sinner above all that are in Jerusalem. If he is ready to sacrifice usefulness for ease, souls for salary, he lacks the spirit of his Master, and has no divine call to the work. Nevertheless, where the prospect of doing good is, in his honest judgment, equal, no man is under obligation to choose want, discomfort, and social separation for their own sake. Paul never submitted to stripes when he could avoid them without neglect of duty; he never stayed in jail when he could get out. For this reason, even where Churches are established on the independent plan, they may be as much restricted by a want of means, as others can be by ecclesiastical law, in the selection of their pastors. The more feeble the Church, the smaller their chance of getting the man they want, and the smaller the probability of their keeping him after they have

succeeded in getting him "settled" among them. The system of the Methodist Episcopal Church does not forbid the expression of preferences either among ministers or people; nor does it forbid that these preferences shall have all the weight to which they are entitled. Still, as our system places in the hands of the episcopacy powers which would otherwise belong to ministers and people generally, and as restriction in Church or State is unpopular, we concede that this feature of the itinerancy is an objection to it.

2. The itinerant system, at certain fixed intervals, removes the pastor with whom the people have become acquainted, and substitutes a stranger in his place.

Where the pastor remains many years in the same location, he becomes familiar with the names, the faces, the history of all who attend his ministrations. He is acquainted with the religious state of each of them, and is prepared to warn, encourage, rebuke, exhort, not at random, but understandingly, just as an old physician knows the constitutional peculiarities of his patients, and how

to prescribe for them. Long-continued kindness and friendly intercourse, enforced by holy living, give power to his words. Year after year he is with them amid life's changing scenes. He officiates at marriages and funerals; he is the family friend and adviser, who has long shared in their joys and their sorrows, and whose very presence suggests a thousand tender memories, even the saddest of which only strengthen his hold upon their hearts.

But among us, every three years, as the law now stands, the minister is assigned a new field of labor, where he is partially or altogether a stranger. New faces surround him; and months, at least, must elapse before he can establish that friendship and mutual confidence which are so desirable both for his usefulness and the good of his people, or even call them by name. This feature of the itinerancy is certainly not one of the elements of its strength.

3. This continual changing of pastors is liable to make the labors and plans of the Church a thing of fits and starts.

One pastor considers the condition of the Church where he is located, looks around upon the community, and proceeds to lay his plans for doing good. He has his convictions in regard to the Sabbath-school, the teachers' Bible class, the class-meetings, the circulation of tracts, and he convinces his people of the soundness of his views, and puts them in operation. Interest is created, good is done, and greater good promised. But his three years expire ; he goes his way and his successor comes. He, too, has his convictions and his plans, his peculiar methods of conducting Church work. The arrangements made by his predecessor do not suit him, and he lays them aside for other plans and agencies, which are no longer-lived than those which they supplant. Thus the Church suffers, because nothing lasts long enough to do its work. These changes in the pastorate are not favorable to the success of measures which require time to develop their results.

4. Another evil incidental to the itinerant system is, that, under it, societies and con-

gregations have less cohesive force than their own good demands.

Our ecclesiastical loyalty regards the whole Church, rather than the particular society to which we are attached. In towns and cities where there are several Churches of our own denomination, they fear each other more than other rivals. When the official brethren are considering whom they would like to have for their next pastor, the thought uppermost in their minds is, the necessity of securing a preacher at least equal in attractive power to their neighbors, that their congregation may not scatter. A Methodist church half a mile away disturbs them more than half a dozen churches of any other name on the same square. If three or four Methodist churches are within easy reach of each other, the competition is almost too strong for good fellowship. If one of them secures a preacher of uncommon popularity, the others undergo a depleting process. Some members of the Church, and many more of the congregation, drift about very much as the tide carries

them. If those who are entitled to certificates of membership would take them, and, enlisting under their new leader, be good and faithful co-workers with him, the injury which they inflict, and the loss which they sustain, would be less. But just in the degree in which they form the habit of wandering about from Sabbath to Sabbath, they are useless in the Church to which they belong, and valueless every-where else. They form no settled religious habits. They are available for no important work. Having no root anywhere, they have no more chance for spiritual life and growth than a tree would have of living and growing if it were dug up and set out in a new place every three days.

This, we are persuaded, is one cause of religious instability among us. If every one of our professed converts could be made to see clearly and feel deeply that he is in duty bound to be an active, steady worker in the society whose register bears his name—that in the house of God, whenever opened for worship—in the Sunday-school, the classroom, and prayer meeting, there is a place

which God and the Church expect him to fill—that in the path of faithful, habitual obedience lie peace and safety, *glory, honor, and immortality*, and there alone—there would be fewer cases of failure. They who would prosper spiritually must have a spiritual home. The psalmist compares the ungodly to chaff blown about with every wind, while the true servant of God is as a tree whose leaf never withers, because it is *planted by the rivers of water*. There are plants which float upon the surface of our ponds, and have no hold upon the soil. There is also a rootless Chinese plant, which draws its sustenance from the air alone; but neither the native production nor the foreign curiosity ever becomes a tree.

Just in proportion to the number of those members who have no root, no feeling of local responsibility, a society lacks solid strength. Where they are numerous, the Church is unsteady and unreliable. Within the space of a few months, or even weeks, it will pass from a comparative solitude to a crowd, from apathy to enthusiasm, from the

freezing point to fever heat, and back again. This is the sin which doth so easily beset the Methodist Churches in the cities. The plan of renting the pews, whatever may be its disadvantages in other directions, tends, in a degree, to remedy the evil. The lengthening of the term of pastoral service has also, we think, lessened it. But the best remedy for it would be a deep and general conviction among the members of our Churches that their peace and safety, their usefulness, their duty to God, to themselves, to their families, demand that they have a Church home—a deep and general conviction that the *living stones* of God's great temple are hewn, squared, laid in their place, and cemented there; not like the pebbles that lie in the bed of the mountain stream, one day whirling along amid the flood and the foam, and the next buried out of sight in the mud. In regard to the stability of the society and congregation, we admit that systems more local and less denominational in their spirit have some advantage over us.

5. The changes of our system sometimes come inopportunately.

God pours out his Spirit, and many are gathered into the fold. These regard with great respect and affection the minister who led them to Christ. If they fall into doubt and temptation, they can tell him of their conflicts more readily than any one else. If they wander from the way, a word from him seems to have more weight than admonition from any other source. He is their counselor, their guide, their spiritual father. A few months pass on, and they reach a critical period in their religious history. The sudden emotions which attended the first part of their experience have subsided, as they needs must. They are no longer swept onward by a tumultuous tide of new joys and hopes. They begin to find that there are currents that set against them, and that only by hard toiling they can make their way. The discovery discourages them. Their great enemy, once defeated, rallies his forces, and returns to the assault, hurling upon them fiery arrows of unbelief and fear.

Suppose just at this point the pastor is removed, and a new one comes. They know him not. They cannot approach him as they were accustomed to approach the other. Weeks, perhaps months, elapse before some of them become acquainted with him; and meanwhile, like a little company of soldiers separated from the main body, they may be attacked and defeated by the watchful and crafty foe.

It may be replied that those who fall away at such times have felt no gracious influence; that they were converted to the man and not to the truth. We are not so sure of that. God's modes of dealing with us take into the account every affection of our hearts, and press into the service every element of our nature. That the convert should care nothing for him who has warned and entreated him, and finally, through divine grace, led him to the fountain of life, would be unnatural. If love and brotherhood belong at all to the Christian character, surely here is a fitting place for their manifestation. And if the communion of saints is a good thing,

cheering, strengthening, this peculiar bond of union must be powerful to hold men to their duty; and, humanly speaking, its rupture under the circumstances named must be to some dangerous, if not disastrous.

6. The brief pastorates of our system are liable to create an unwise love of novelty and excitement.

When a man of only average ability occupies the same pulpit for a long term of years, his ministry will not interest his hearers, nor wield the same power over them that it would were he a new man among them. He becomes a book which the congregation have read and reviewed—a “thrice-told tale.” The tendency is to dullness and deadness. The itinerant system, on the contrary, by its periodic changes, rouses curiosity, and draws the people to the house of God by the force of novelty. Hence there is peril in an opposite direction, a danger of creating a restless, feverish demand for novelty and excitement. The hearer may unconsciously fall into the habit of estimating the sermon in proportion to its power to please for the

moment, and pay more attention to the messenger than to the good tidings which he proclaims. There is a possibility that the mind may be entertained while the heart is not reached; that we watch so closely for eloquence that we forget worship, and in the very temple of the Lord become more thoughtful than prayerful, and critical rather than devout.

It seems clear that a congregation seeking a new pastor among scores of candidates, and hearing one stranger after another every Sabbath, will run down in the spirituality of worship. And under the continual changes of the itinerancy, the same tendency is strong enough in some minds to justify our being on our guard against it. How our people prick up their ears at the sound of a new name! How ready some of them are to run from one church to another when they hear the announcement of some unusual theme! They may not examine their own hearts sufficiently to comprehend their motives; still it is not uncharitable for us to suspect that if they would sift the matter

they would find they are in quest of entertainment rather than spiritual profit, and that they are more curious than pious. The plea that they are in search of good sermons, that they wander anxiously about for the health of their souls, is disproved by the fact that they show otherwise no unusual regard for their spiritual interests; and that, as a rule, they are less attentive to the other means of grace, the prayer-meeting and the class-meeting—less reliable for any good word or work—than those who are always found in their places in the house of God.

Here, then, is one of the incidental evils of the itinerant system. In minds of a certain class it fosters a love of excitement which wars directly with true devotion, and with that serious, prayerful hearing of the word which leads to growth in grace. To those who listen only to criticise, nothing that they hear seems to have divine weight. They are so absorbed in watching the style in which the preacher does his work, that in their case, at least, nothing is done. Their minds resemble those bad anchorage grounds

which annoy the sailor and endanger the ship, where the vessel drags all her anchors because the mud is too soft for them to take hold. The apostolic warning in regard to *itching ears* is not an unnecessary admonition.

7. Another evil incidental to the itinerancy is, that in regard to their degree of responsibility for the success of the Gospel, the views of our people are not always as clear, nor their convictions as deep, as they should be.

Our system gives rise to an incessant measuring and weighing of ministers. The constant inquiry is, "How does he succeed?" The great demand is for men that "make things go." Within certain limits the inquiry and the demand are right. The pastor of a Church has a greater responsibility than any other man connected with it. He has more power for good or evil. His zeal may rouse that of his people, his holy life be their pattern, his faith, hope, and charity teach them the same graces. His feebleness may weaken the Church, his coldness chill

it, his follies rend it. At the same time the members of the Church have their obligations, numerous and weighty, which it is not well to forget. The pastor is the leader of the host ; but what can a leader do without men ? He may be the captain of the ship ; but the members are not mere passengers, whose chief concern is to eat, and drink, and criticise their fare, and lounge in the sunshine when they find themselves unable to sleep below. They are the crew. Each has, in the sight of God, a place to fill and a duty to perform. Each man is under a divine obligation to stand at his post, and pull steadily at his rope, by day and by night ; when the soft ripples glitter in the sun and make music around the prow, and when the skies are dark and storms lash the sounding sea.

In the case of a "settled" minister, the people reason thus : "Here is our pastor. He does not turn out to be all that we thought he was. He is not all that we would have him. But to remove him against his will is a work of difficulty. To persecute him into willingness would be cruel, and divide the Church.

Whether eloquent or dull, whether popular or only tolerated, he is our pastor, and we must do our best to succeed with him."

With us the temptation is to say, in unpromising cases, "Ah, well, this good brother does not seem to be accomplishing much. He will achieve no great success. So we will wait as patiently as we can, a year or two, and then we will have another." And this "waiting" oftentimes signifies slackness, negligence, want of energy and zeal in the cause, want of cordial co-operation with the pastor. There may be instances where this is the best mode of procedure that can be adopted; but such instances must be few and far between. Surely moderate success is better than total failure. To resolve to do nothing until the change can be had is not wise nor right. It is something like a wife's neglecting her family on the plea that her husband is rather a poor specimen of a man, and when he dies she hopes to get a better one.

It sometimes happens, too, that when a pastor is appointed, all are not equally

pleased with the arrangement. Some think that they could have made a better choice; and they are tempted, especially if there have been previous debates on the subject, to wait, and let the man whom the other side have selected prove that he is the right one for the place. Of course, in such circumstances slight proof will not suffice; and the danger is that they will leap to a hasty conclusion, shake their heads ominously, and say with a sigh, "I feared it; I feared it." Worst of all, they fall into an inactivity which disheartens their brethren, and secures the very result which they foretell. And when the failure is only too apparent, they really regret it with the others; and yet deep down in their hearts, their sorrow over it is perceptibly alleviated by the fact that their sagacity was equal to the task of predicting it. Thus where the appointment at the beginning does not satisfy all concerned, the anticipation of changes in the pastorate supplies a temptation to make effort less steady, less persevering, less general, than the good of the Church demands.

And even in those cases where the labors of the pastor have been generally acceptable and useful, there is danger that the latter part of his term of service may become a mere blank, the people being so intent on making new arrangements that they forget their present duty.

These are some of what we recognize as points of possible friction in our Church enginery, considered with reference to the people. We are aware that the effects which we have dwelt upon do not always appear; and that even where they are seen and felt there are often compensating influences which work substantial good. We are also aware that in debate these incidental evils are often greatly exaggerated. Still, we admit that these are points of peril or of loss, where our system is liable, at times, to put us at disadvantage.

There are, also, under our system, incidental disadvantages which affect the minister.

1. It restricts him in the choice of his field of labor.

Under no system, indeed, is there unrestricted choice. Where the whole arrangement is left to the minister and the people, as in some other denominations of Christians, a man of great attractiveness and power in the pulpit may be sought for so generally that a wide circle is open for his selection; but ministers of average ability do not find it so. The prominent Churches are hard to suit, and make great demands upon candidates for the pastorate. As the less wealthy societies are restricted in their choice by their lack of means, so average men are restricted by the shape which the demand for ministerial labor assumes. And, let it be repeated, systems must be judged, not by exceptional cases, but by the way in which they work under ordinary circumstances.

Still, on the plans adopted by some other Churches, there is no legal bar between the minister who wants a church and the congregation who want a pastor. The society can "call" any man they choose; and the man thus called can come if he wishes to

come. He considers the matter for himself, and conducts the negotiation in his own way. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the bishop who presides at the conference is charged with the responsible duty of choosing the Gospel laborer for each particular field, the preacher and the people both agreeing to abide by his impartial judgment. But sometimes the people are tempted to think, that if the matter had been wholly in their hands they could have selected a better man. Sometimes the minister is tempted to think, that if he had been free to do so he could have secured a better place. The impressions in both cases may not be very well founded. If, indeed, the society or the minister could wield episcopal power in their own case, and not be trammelled by obligations in other directions, the result might be satisfactory to the party making the appointment. But were they to intrust themselves to the independent plan, they might find competitions and rivalries that would reduce them practically to a level no higher than that of which they now complain. But

whether real or imaginary, the impression itself may be an evil, and the system which furnishes occasion for it is, so far, imperfect.

2. The itinerancy tends to keep a minister among comparative strangers all his effective life.

The itinerant, as he goes on his divine mission, will find many congenial spirits, and form many warm and permanent attachments. Nevertheless, he has not so good an opportunity as he would have in a more settled mode of life to form and maintain those deep and confidential intimacies which alone fill the measure of our idea of friendship. By the time he finds out in whom he may wholly confide, he is separated from them by the expiration of his term. Another society claims his mind and heart; another pastor claims the friendly attentions of those whom he has left behind him. Distance hinders intercourse, and is apt, after a time, to interrupt it wholly. He is like a traveler who meets many toward whom he feels drawn, but from whom he soon separates as their paths diverge. The itinerancy

may have a degree of compensation in that it buries aversions as well as friendships; yet we admit, in this thing, a balance of evil. A man needs tried friends near at hand.

3. The itinerancy deprives the minister and his family of a permanent place of residence.

Permanence is one element of the full idea of home. Most men tend to take root in the soil. The thoughts which haunt the mind of the weary wanderer are the memories, not merely of friends and loved ones, but of a familiar spot, where dwell those whom he loves, and whose every feature of outward seeming—the house, the brook, the hill—is imprinted on his soul. Men have a strong desire to own land, more or less, acres or rods, and possess a habitation which they can call their own, and arrange and adorn according to their taste.

The active itinerant has *no certain dwelling-place*. He can remain but three years, at the longest, in one locality. The house in which he lives is not his own, nor can he do with it as he would. He knows that others

are to occupy it after him, and that ideas of convenience and beauty differ among men, and what he builds or arranges with great zeal, others may as zealously pull to pieces. His children have lived in half a score of habitations; and yet, in their after life, there lies in their hearts no tender memory of the home of their childhood, no sunny spot whose every flower and tree, bubbling rivulet and mossy rock, they know and love. One child's birth-place is here, and another's yonder. If death enters the family circle, he lays his dead among strangers, and the graves of his loved ones are soon left behind by our quick-recurring changes. Thus only in a modified sense does the familiar lyric of "Home, sweet home," appeal to the hearts of the itinerant and his family.

To some there may be a charm in this wandering life; to many it may be a thing almost of indifference; but not so to all. Some yearn for a fixed home. They love their work, and hold strongly to our system of changes; yet they cherish an undefined hope that at some future time they will live

in their own houses, and sit under the shadow of their own trees. They husband their means, and buy a house, or a little lot, and fancy that in the coming years it will be their abiding place. Their imaginations revel in the thought. They indulge in visions of rest and enjoyment. They build ideal houses, and have day-dreams of planting and reaping; and their heads are as full of romance as ever they were in the dreamy days of their childhood. It may be that in this matter there is not as much difference between ourselves and the ministers of other denominations as there seems to be. It is very possible that the day-dreams aforesaid may overrate the real value of the thing at which they aim. Nevertheless, the haunting temptation is an evil, as far as it goes, and so we give it a place in our list of drawbacks on our system.

4. The itinerant cannot expect to wield among his people the influence which a wise and good man attains in the course of a long pastorate.

Among us, pastoral changes are so rapid

that, where the societies are large, the shepherd scarce becomes acquainted with his flock before he is compelled to leave them. His people may soon learn to revere his piety and respect his judgment ; but it takes time for them to know him, and he them, so intimately that a confidential friendship is established between him and each individual. The itinerant makes progress in winning this confidence ; he may grow stronger in the love of his people the longer he remains ; he sees the blade and the ear, but reaps only a little of the full corn of the ripening harvest.

In the general community he fares worse still. An able preacher, a brilliant platform orator, will indeed soon become known as such, and be in sufficient demand as a speaker at public meetings. But on those occasions which demand confessed weight of character, and influence over the popular mind, the itinerant is apt to be passed by, and the settled pastor put in the prominent place. This is especially the case in the great cities. We are sometimes tempted to

fancy that the settled pastors are by no means unwilling to avail themselves of the advantages of their position, and that there is a spice of affectation in the oft-repeated reason which they give for politely inviting the Methodist minister to a back seat while they *go up higher*—"Really you are so short a time in one place that we hardly get acquainted." We do not count this effect one of the good features of our system.

5. The itinerancy tends in some cases to lessen the amount paid for the support of the pastor.

Where the negotiation takes place directly between the minister and the people who desire his services, the question of temporalities belongs legitimately to the discussion; and where the minister, by reason of his acceptability, has a choice of offers, and the people learn the fact, there is a spur to liberality. Among us, the minister may or may not be approached by persons connected with the Church which is looking in his direction. They may deem it equally effectual and more prudent, to lay their case be-

fore the bishop and the elders only ; and the matter is determined on grounds other than those of demand on the one side and pecuniary obligation on the other. No chance is given to make a bargain. The people know what ministers must take new appointments; what Churches must have new pastors, and what arrangement is natural and probable. They do not always feel that there is need of any special exertion in order to secure the man that they want. And even if there is room for doubt, owing to the desire of other Churches to obtain the candidate, the fact that success lasts only three years at the very longest, cools competition. The large city Churches are aware, too, that they are regarded as prominent and honorable positions, and that many ministers feel the promptings of an ambition, not unworthy of their calling, to show that they are *workmen who need not to be ashamed* anywhere.

6. The itinerancy tempts ministers to study the arts of popularity ; and, in order to attain position, to use means which “do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.”

It is very natural that the itinerant should now and then think of the future, and ask himself the question, "Where will be my field of labor when my term here expires?" He runs his eyes over the list of Churches which must have new pastors at the next conference, and considers which of them are desirable. If his support in the past has not been adequate to his wants, he is tempted to become anxious, and *troubled about many things*. If he is naturally desponding and sensitive, the case is still worse. If he suffers his mind to dwell on the matter, until he lays himself open to the assaults of Satan—if unbelief overcomes faith in God, and jealousy usurps the place of love to the brethren—he begins to ask himself what he shall do to secure the place which he wants. What can he do? Shall he seek to ingratiate himself with the leading laymen? Shall he approach some one of them with whom he is intimate, and ask him to advocate his cause? Shall he speak slightly of the merits of those who are likely to be his competitors? Our system cre-

ates a constant weighing and measuring of the members of the conference; both ministers and people engage in the canvass; and the ministers are often found the severest in their estimates. Under an influence of which they are not conscious, they sometimes become censorious, and undervalue their brethren. They disseminate among the people of their charge adverse opinions and prejudices, which sour their minds, and greatly increase the difficulties of the appointing power. Thus the friction natural to our system is augmented by the weakness and the sin of those who ought to be wiser and better. Thus they sow thorns for their own feet.

Other temptations are not unknown. A minister who is indolent by nature, and whose piety is not deep enough to furnish driving power sufficient to keep him in motion, may be tempted to take things in an easy way, saying to himself, "I am safe—the Church must find me a place."

On the other hand, an earnest, energetic man, who has never examined thoroughly

the moral aspects of the matter, feels the temptation to purchase a sort of success by ways and means which, to say the least, are questionable. He knows that the members of the Methodist Church dote on a crowd. He knows that a man of only moderate abilities, if neither too pious nor too proud, can generally raise the crowd ; and that the more light and frivolous the prevailing taste, the more easily the thing is done. Look at the style of the lectures which draw the largest houses. Judged by the criterion of numbers, eloquence, so called, is preferred to instruction, and fun is more popular than fact. The multitudes are apt to run after the humorists whose very faces, in advance of words, provoke a smile. Certain styles of mind, like certain kinds of fish, are best caught with a fly, and an artificial one at that. Consequently a preacher who thinks that he must fill the house or be pronounced a failure, and is not very scrupulous in regard to the means, being, as we have said, neither too pious nor too proud, is tempted to have recourse to the angler's artificial

bait, to cast about him for out-of-the-way subjects, to study small eccentricities in manner or matter, to be superficially original and elaborately peculiar. In this way the crowd may be gathered, but what good is done? The flock "look up and are not fed." The unconverted leave the house of God, not smiting their breasts and saying, "God be merciful," but repeating, with noisy merri-ment, the witticisms which they have heard, or commenting on the eccentricities which have been exhibited. To them the sermon is not a warning, a voice from the eternal world, awing their souls into silence and solemn thought, but a mere entertainment, which, leaving untouched the conscience and the heart, amuses for the hour.

The itinerancy leads certain minds into temptation in these directions, because the itinerant must make himself felt at once. He who gives way to an unholy ambition is afraid to trust to sound thought and solid strength, for these make no noisy talk in the community, gather no sudden crowd, create no sudden fame. The really intelli-

gent and thoughtful, who love solidity and strength, are not readily drawn from their accustomed paths ; and sudden crowds, consequently, must be made up of the frivolous and the impulsive. Soundness and strength may, in the abstract, be best ; but the pulpit trifler deems them too slow to suit his purpose, or to meet the requirements of a system which requires all to be done in so short a time. We are aware that these same temptations may occur under other systems as well as our own, and that full-blown specimens of clap-trap and charlatanry may be found in the "settled ministry," as well as elsewhere. Still, we deem the temptation one that occurs more readily under a system which demands rapid results.

7. An itinerant system is liable to become burdened with unavailable men.

Under all systems young men sometimes deem themselves called to the work, give enough of promise to open to them the doors of the ministry, and yet, in after life, never realize their own hopes, or justify the expectations of their friends. They may be

pious, sensible, intelligent, and even learned, but they do not succeed. They are blameless in life, and amiable in their whole deportment, but they do not succeed. They preach fair sermons, and offer good prayers, and seem to be doing all they know how to do ; but they do not succeed. Wherever they go congregations fall off, the Church loses courage, and Zion languishes. Thus it may continue year after year, everybody seeing it and sorrowing over it, themselves included.

Now, under the congregational system, such unfortunate ministers are before long found standing in the ecclesiastical marketplace *idle, because no man hath hired them ;* and after waiting awhile turn aside to some other mode of doing good. When one of this sort loses his place, no one else is under obligation to find another for him. The Churches "call" whom they will ; he is not called, and that is the end of it. But under our itinerant system, so long as a minister is in good standing in his conference, and is technically "effective," the appointing power

is compelled to assign him a field of labor. The Discipline, indeed, provides that "when a traveling minister is accused of being so unacceptable, inefficient, or secular as to be no longer useful in his work, the conference shall investigate the case, and if it appear that the complaint is well founded, and the accused will not voluntarily retire, the conference may locate him without his consent." But this process involves a formal arraignment, a charge, a trial, a conviction, and perhaps an appeal, and another hearing of the case at the General Conference; and the whole proceeding is distasteful and painful to all concerned, and the legal provision avails little for the relief the Church. Thus, year after year, men are appointed to fields of labor where they are unwelcome, and seeming to do the best they can, are unsuccessful and unhappy, and the work of the Church is hindered. A merciless application of the law would remedy the evil; but it is hard for good men to deal with each other in a merciless way. How, then, shall we prevent a fatal accumulation of this dead

weight? The just and true method is to guard the door of entrance, never opening it to any candidate in whose case there is room for reasonable doubt. A man who was received against the real convictions of those who voted for his admission into conference has a right to complain if his brethren, when he has reached middle age, and is too old to begin life over again in some other sphere, arraign him for want of success, and visit upon his failures a penalty which rightfully belongs to their own want of wisdom and candor.

Thus we have glanced upon the bright side and the shadows of the itinerancy, endeavoring to see things exactly as they are. There can be no question that the judgment of our people is fixed strongly in favor of the system; and a hundred years of success add their accumulating evidence of its wisdom.

The only modification under discussion of late is in regard to the length of the pastoral term, which is now limited to three years. It is argued by some that all re-

striction should be removed, and that pastors should be reappointed from year to year, as long as they continue to be acceptable and useful in their several fields of labor. This change is urged as being especially needful in our large cities, where the fixed pastorates of other denominations give them, it is alleged, a great advantage over us. It is said that our ablest ministers do not remain long enough in any one place to gain influence in the general community, and that consequently we have no names which are universally recognized as towers of strength among us, and that if we would have solid structures, we must take the time needed to build them.

There may be force in this plea, but there is not enough to settle the question. It seems to me that to take off the restriction, and make unlimited reappointments possible, is to surrender our ministers and Churches to nearly all the embarrassments of what is called the settled pastorate system. Moreover, there is a sort of social position which is more showy than valuable. To be in re-

quest on state occasions, when the presence of a clergyman, and perhaps a few words of decorous prayer, are supposed to lend dignity to the spectacle ; to be on good terms with the fashionable world, and to be the recipient of its smiles, and more substantial favors, gives small proof that a minister is devoted to his work, and is doing it with fearless fidelity.

But there are valid arguments against so violent a change of our methods. There may be certain incidental disadvantages of the present system ; but as a system it has done and is doing good work. Every great human organization is so under the influence of subtle agencies, so complicated with the interests, the convictions, and the impulses of men, the good and the evil of human nature, that it is difficult to foresee the ultimate results of important changes of general plans of action. It is said to have been a maxim of the first Napoleon never to decide a great question to-day, if it is safe to defer it till to-morrow. The maxim is a wise one if wisely applied. A single

day often changes the whole aspect of affairs. In any event the delay will give time for additional thought and inquiry. In our own case no sudden and radical movement is needed. The General Conference of 1864 extended the pastoral term, making it three years instead of two. If, in the judgment of the Church, a still longer term is needed, let the limit be fixed at five years. I would be willing to try this for a suitable period, and let experience determine whether or not it is wise to go further in the same direction.

Thus we have set forth what we deem the chief points of friction or of danger incidental to our system. We have tried to put them strongly rather than diminish them; to discuss the subject fairly, extenuating nothing which weighs against our system, nor setting down aught in malice against others.



CHAPTER V.

OUR EPISCOPACY—ITS ORIGIN AND PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS.

And he gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.—EPH. iv, 11, 12.

PAUL enunciates a principle which, as ecclesiastical history shows, is often forgotten, to wit, that the ministry exists for the sake of the work to be done. The founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 entertained no high Church fancies in regard to forms of government. They were fully persuaded, with Mr. Wesley, that no particular mode of organization is essential, and that the “succession” of the devotees of prelacy, whether Romish or Anglican, is a fable neither warranted by Scripture nor found in authentic history. They saw

that Methodism, not by human design, but evidently by the providence of God, had already crystallized into episcopacy. Mr. Wesley declared that he believed himself to be "a scriptural *episcopus* as much as any man in England." This statement, bold as it may seem in the eyes of prelatical theorists, falls below the truth. He had a clearer, more scriptural claim to the title of bishop than any dignitary of the State Church, because, as we have seen, they were not elected to office in a scriptural way, but owed their elevation to the will of a single lay member of the Church. Wesley, on the other hand, was the chosen leader of hundreds of faithful, successful ministers of the Gospel, and of tens of thousands of believers whose holy lives *adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*. Asbury was filling the same high office, and doing the same great work in America. His election by the Conference and ordination by Dr. Coke in 1784 were only the formal recognition of the official position which he already occupied, and whose most important duties

he had been faithfully performing for the space of thirteen years.

All parties were fully agreed that the work must proceed without departure from the original methods. They regarded the itinerancy as essential to the continued success of the work. They regarded episcopacy, whether under that name or otherwise, as essential to the itinerancy, and for this reason they established an episcopal form of Church government. The action of Wesley and the conference in 1784 added nothing to the official responsibilities of Asbury, except in relation to ordination and the sacraments. Long before that action was taken, he wielded greater power than the whole twelve bishops of the present day. He not only appointed the preachers, but determined whom to receive into the itinerant ministry. At the conference he listened to the discussions, but himself decided every question. His power was thus defined by a formal vote of the conference: "On hearing every preacher for or against what is in debate, the right of determination shall rest

with him according to the Minutes." As the Church increased in numbers, and the ministry grew in experience and weight of character, the responsibilities which at the beginning had been of necessity laid solely upon Asbury were by degrees divided between him and the whole body of ministers; and finally the conference assumed all legislative functions, leaving the episcopacy in the position of an executive department only. In the most important point of all, the duty of assigning the fields in which the preachers shall labor, the office of the bishop remains what it was in the time of Asbury. Our episcopacy clearly owes its very existence to the convictions of the founders of the Church that it is essential to the preservation of the itinerant system in its most effective form.

It is not denied, indeed, that an itinerancy of some sort may be maintained without a central appointing agency; but the true idea requires more than mere clerical changes, however frequent and regular. It demands that the allotments of ministerial work shall

not be controlled by local aims, and personal interests and preferences, but be guided by broad, unselfish views of the great mission of the Church. To secure clear official oversight and impartial action, it is best that those who map out the field, and assign the laborers their places, shall not hold such relations to the work as will be liable either to wrest their judgment, or expose them to suspicion.

In a genuine itinerancy the pastors cannot choose their own fields of service. For them to do this in clerical council, consulting only their own interests and preferences, and holding no communication with the Churches with whose affairs they are thus dealing, would be so manifestly one-sided and unjust that the plan would not be likely to last long among a people like ours. Nor could the Churches, as represented by their leading men, assembled in a lay council, assume to deal with the ministry on that principle. This, too, would be one-sided and unjust. The only remaining device to maintain the itinerancy without an independent appoint-

ing power is to permit the ministers and the individual Churches to make their own arrangements on such terms as are mutually satisfactory. Whatever advantages this method may have in those denominations whose laws do not fix any limit to the length of pastoral service, it is not suited to a system in which incessant changes are inevitable. There would often be a lack of concord in the individual society, when the members came together to select their pastor, and men of determined will would be brought into persistent collision. As at Corinth, one faction would contend for Paul, another argue in favor of Apollos, and a third demand Cephas; and the final decision would leave a party disappointed, and perhaps soured and angry, because of the suspicion, or the proof, of unfairness on the part of the victors.

Again: societies would become open rivals, and bid against each other for the possession of the clerical favorite of the hour, turning the annual sessions of the conference into ecclesiastical vendues, at which

"gifts" might be in great demand, and "grace and usefulness" be too often ruled out of the market. If the attempt be made to add a balance wheel to this crazy machine by making it necessary to submit the list of contemplated appointments to a vote of the conference, to be examined and, if need be, amended, before adoption, the system is still greatly defective. The conference, as such, knows too little of the individual cases to make it safe in its decisions without the expenditure of more time than can possibly be secured for the purpose of consideration.

Certain evil tendencies and results seem to me to be inevitable. The societies will of course be anxious each to secure the most acceptable minister within their reach. The preachers will be equally anxious to secure good places. They will seek information in regard to Churches, the amount of labor to be performed, the certainty of a comfortable support, the desirableness of places of residence as regards health, social advantages, and educational facilities for their

children, and each will try to make as good a bargain as possible. Certain positions will be in demand, others will be dreaded. Men in popular favor will tend to the desirable places. Men of moderate abilities will, at least for a time, eagerly push for better positions than they obtain; and repeated rebuffs will render some angry, envious, and censorious, others spiritless and sullen. It being perfectly legitimate under this plan to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the different parts of the field, considerations of this nature will become more and more powerful. The strong Churches will find no difficulty in monopolizing the best popular talent, while the men for whom nobody asks will drift steadily in the direction of the places which nobody wants.

But this result will not be reached silently and in the peaceful flow of events. There will be perpetual complaint and clamor from uneasy preachers and dissatisfied Churches. Petition and remonstrance, strife and strategy, will be rife, and perpetual struggles for

place sow dissension where the highest mutual confidence and respect ought to reign. This will produce, slowly and surely, another effect. It will compel the conference to be increasingly cautious in the admission of new members, the aim being to exclude all whom it may possibly become hard to appoint. This, in itself, might be accounted a good effect of the method; but close upon it will follow another, which is destructive of that bold evangelism by which alone great and rapid success is achieved. There will be reluctance to enlarge the area of labor, and undertake new work, because, under the system, an obscure locality, hard toil, and scanty remuneration repel men who are "prospecting" for good places, and thus the poorer parts of the field become a source of perpetual embarrassment.

To this is welded the final link in the chain of evil. When the Church has become fixed in this resultant line of policy; when the sessions of the conference are degraded into mere ecclesiastical fairs, to which preachers and people resort to push

their bargains, the day of evangelical power and aggressive force is waning. The whole tendency of this perpetual buying and selling is to impress the lesson that the first duty of a minister is to take care of his own interests. When all its methods have become adjusted to this rule, the Church has about got its growth. It no more looks for opening doors. It no more strives to push into *the regions beyond*. Then is the era of ease and torpid respectability; of splendid houses of worship, and fine parsonages, and liberal salaries; of cold ceremonies, heartless preaching, and no revivals; and the Church, no more the refuge of the penitent and the joy of the devout, no more the loved home of the poor and the humble as well as the rich and the exalted, is valued chiefly because of the social advantages which it affords, and because it ministers to *the lust of the eye and the pride of life*.

To all this it may be replied that facts disprove our reasonings; that the English Wesleyans keep up an effective itinerant system without the intervention of a distinct

appointing power. I desire always to speak of the Wesleyans with the greatest respect, and to set forth with diffidence conclusions in regard to matters far away, and very possibly only partially understood; but their system of labor is not a success.

Under the English Wesleyan plan the preachers and the leading laymen of the local societies correspond with each other, and make arrangements wherever it is found practicable. A Stationing Committee, previously appointed by the conference, make out, a few weeks before the annual session, a list of appointments which includes the men and the places already arranged, and the committee's plan for the remainder. This list is published for the information of all interested, and both preachers and people are at liberty to name alterations wherever they deem them desirable. The Committee meet again at the Conference, review their work in the light of the information gained or or the arguments adduced, and make such changes as appear necessary. The list, as amended, is laid before the Conference, by

which body it may be still further amended, and is then adopted.

The Wesleyan system is as complete as any can well be that lacks the central appointing power, which is the distinctive feature of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It has had the advantage of an open field, a homogeneous population, and ample funds. Its financial plans may be pronounced perfect. No class of people are better provided for than the English Wesleyan preachers and their families. The whole system is now old enough to develope fully the tendencies and consequences of the methods adopted.

And the fact is patent to all observers that as the Wesleyan system has by degrees gravitated into its present form, its evangelical power has steadily declined, till aggressive force seems to be lost. The letter of the British Conference to our General Conference, in 1868, said: "We lament that the increase in the members of our societies is comparatively small," and in his address, the Rev. Mr. Punshon added, "The com-

parative smallness of the impressions produced by the religious agencies is to us a matter of personal searching and humbleness." The letter of the British Conference to the General Conference of 1872 is in the same desponding strain: "Tested by the old method, the increase of numbers in our societies, our work has not advanced as we could wish."

The published statistics give great significance to this language. In 1805 the Wesleyan societies numbered 140,544 communicants. In 1825 they numbered 283,057, having more than doubled in twenty years. In 1839 they numbered 420,178 communicants, the annual increase averaging 8,000 for a period of thirty-four years. Then followed a period of internal agitations which resulted in extensive ruptures and serious losses. The last few years have been free from these calamities, and yet the Wesleyans show little progress. In 1863 the societies in the island of Great Britain numbered 367,306 communicants. The next nine years exhibit an actual decrease. In

1874 there were 376,439 communicants, making an increase of only 9,103 in eleven years. Two other significant facts give these figures a still more sinister aspect. During this same period of eleven years, while the Wesleyans were almost standing still, the Primitive Methodists were steadily and rapidly advancing, and the population of the island increased two millions of souls. Alas, where are the victories of other days?

How shall this deplorable loss of aggressive force be explained? The Wesleyans have not abandoned the peculiar doctrines of Methodism. The overshadowing State Church was more powerful, relatively, in the time of Wesleyan growth than in these later days. Human nature is the same that it was in the days that are gone, when there was steady progress in all parts of the field. Doubtless the causes of this diminution of evangelical power are many and multiform, some of them wholly beyond human control, and yet others visible and palpable, and not without a remedy. The Wesleyans have been injured by their obsequious deference

for the State Church, and have damaged themselves by lending their strength to prop its abuses, and cause them to last a little longer. Their peculiar terms of membership, unscriptural, unreasonable, and impracticable, by virtue of which those whose lives may be without reproach are thrust out of the society for neglecting a mere human regulation, must be a cause of continual losses. Their reluctance, as a body, to take the right position in regard to the temperance reform, a reform so loudly demanded by every patriotic principle, and every Christian instinct, in England as well as in America, must involve a decay of moral power. These things account in some degree for the decline of their aggressive force; but I am persuaded that not the least of adverse influences is to be found in the very heart of the Wesleyan system itself.

It seems to me that their method of distributing ministerial labor is unwise; that it is calculated to destroy enthusiasm for the cause, cultivate a worldly spirit, engender endless personal rivalries among the min-

isters, and teach them to be tenacious of what they deem their claims to consideration. The financial system of the Wesleyans has been greatly lauded, and yet its very completeness is a constant warning, a perpetual admonition to be prudent, not to fall victims of that indiscreet zeal for God's house which sometimes eats men up. The legislation of the conference shows this to a degree which is surprising, and even painful, to an American Methodist. In 1805 the proportion aimed at in making the appointments was declared by vote to be one preacher to four hundred and fifty members. In 1813 it was decreed that "no additional single preacher can be sent, in future, to any circuit, unless such circuit engage to support an additional married preacher, instead of the single preacher, at the end of four years at the latest." The same year the following minute was passed, and two years after another calling attention to it: "Our friends who may contemplate in future the erection of new chapels are earnestly entreated to inquire, before any decisive step is taken,

whether by the building of such chapel, an additional traveling preacher will not be rendered necessary; and whether in that case they can support him out of the funds of the chapel, or of their own circuit.”—*Grindrod*, pp. 35, 36, 314. Thus it appears that not a finger could be lifted to enlarge the field till the financial supplies for all possible contingencies were deemed secure. This may be prudent, but it is not apostolic. It savors of too much care for the workman, and too little for the work. Would it not have been a little nearer the idea of the Gospel system if the conference had resolved to receive no man into membership until he had gone into some new field and gathered from the world a Church able to support its pastor? When ministers and Churches lose the spirit of sacrifice, the courage to do and dare, they cannot retain, in any large measure, the spirit of effective evangelism.

The Wesleyan system of itinerancy is even less capable of aggressive movement than the congregational form of organization. In independent Churches, young men

begin where they must, and ministers seeking places must take such as offer. No one is bound to find a place for them. Consequently there are generally some who are ready to take the poor places, and be content with a moderate support, until the Churches grow into strength in their hands. The Wesleyans take no man into the clerical ranks till they can make him equal with his brethren in regard to salary. This necessarily compels a degree of caution which is fatal to evangelical energy and aggression.

It ought not to be forgotten that the Wesleyans have, at various times, suffered greatly from schisms; but even these losses may have been, at least in part, the evil fruit of their system. The mode of appointing the preachers is such as to invite an endless strife for place, to demand constant self-assertion, and create perpetual antagonism. When this comes to be recognized as the normal condition of things, it requires but a small share of the reasoning faculty to discover the truth of Solomon's declaration that

two are better than one, and to see that personal influence and skillful combinations of various kinds are not without potency. Rings, cliques, and factions, more or less covert but none the less real, tend thus to form and, by mutual aid, to bestow upon certain men, each in his turn, a monopoly of the posts of honor and profit, thereby persistently excluding other men equally able, and perhaps equally ambitious, from the places which they are justly entitled to share. There is reason to suspect that there have been disruptions and secessions caused, at least in part, by the persistency of certain members of the Wesleyan Conference, who gathered the reins of power into their hands and held them tight, filling the prominent places year after year, so that other men, not of the favored few, but men of ability, and not unworthy of a place among the leaders of the host, were kept rigidly in the background, till continued disappointment destroyed fraternal confidence, created discontent, and at last produced fatal alienation.

In regard to the itinerancy, American

Methodism is much nearer the original model than are the Wesleyans. Our bishops bear much the same burden of responsibility that was laid upon Wesley and Asbury. Communications between the preachers and the people in regard to appointments are not the rule, but the exception; and even where they occur, it is well understood by both parties that all negotiation is outside of Church law and without authority, and that nothing is fixed until the appointing power, so placed as to be as free from incentives to do wrong as any human agency can well be, examines the case, not by itself only, but in connection with the whole work of which it forms a part, and decides it on broad views of duty to God and the souls of men.

Thus the evangelizing forces are organized, and the work is planned on the original missionary idea. *The field is the world.* There is still a place for toil and sacrifice and Gospel courage; and by toil, and sacrifice, and courage, the work goes on with undiminished power and success. Whether

we consider it as a theory, or measure its value as tested by results, the fundamental features of our plan are abundantly vindicated. American Methodism places the entire clerical force of the Church in the hands of the bishop, to be wielded by him for the most effectual prosecution of the great work. Questions of salary, local attachment, the personal preferences of the preachers, all considerations which would place the worker foremost and make the work secondary, are held subordinate to the infinitely greater interests involved. In like manner the friendships and personal preferences of the laymen of the various societies cannot be suffered to shape the action of the appointing power. Where the pastor may be gratified, or the people, or both, by the arrangements made, while the best interests of the cause are also secured, it is so much the better; but, on principle, the interests of the work must control, and all else must bend before them.

In fine, Methodist episcopacy is simply a means adopted to secure a certain end. It

did not originate in any High Church drive in regard to the "succession," and the manipulation of scalps. Wesley and the whole body of American Methodists believed that a vigorous itinerancy was necessary for the work, and that a superintendency invested with almost plenary powers is a necessary element of such an itinerancy. They deemed it their duty to perpetuate a certain method of supervising the interests of the Church, and of distributing ministerial labor, a method which, originating in England and adopted in America, had shown itself, on both sides of the Atlantic, to be acceptable, safe, and of wondrous efficiency.

Our episcopacy having thus originated in the conviction that the continued success of the rising Church demanded the preservation of the methods under which the work had been so well begun, and the ninety years of subsequent history having abundantly vindicated this judgment, the question open for discussion at the present day is, Does the episcopacy need any modification to adapt it to the times? Have defects

been disclosed which need a remedy? Is any change required, either to render the office more efficient, or to guard more carefully the rights of ministry or laity?

This inquiry is not new, nor is it redolent of revolution. To question, examine, and reason is the instinctive work of every active, intelligent mind; and from wise questioning, candid examination, and sound reasoning there is no ground to fear that truth and righteousness will suffer. The Church cordially accepts the episcopacy, and in all her borders is free from discontent and agitation. Nevertheless, various hypothetical changes have been brought forward in various quarters for discussion. The principal modifications which have been named are four in number. One suggestion is to increase the number of bishops to fifty or a hundred, or more, that they may have minute personal knowledge of the ministry and the work, and that they may be available every-where, not only for presiding at annual conferences, but for dedications, missionary meetings, and extraordinary serv-

ices of all kinds; another, to elect the bishops, not for life, but for four or eight years, with possibilities of re-election; a third, to appoint them to their several districts, to preside annually over the same conferences for a term of four years; a fourth, to remove from the office certain portions of its power, either giving them to the presiding eldership, or remanding them to the conference. Let us examine these proposed modifications, briefly, each in its turn.

A relative increase of the number of the bishops is needless and unwise.

The notion that the bishop must have a full and accurate knowledge of all things pertaining to the working of the appointments, and gather that information by a personal acquaintance with preachers, people, and places is superficial, and fails to grasp the consequences which would follow its adoption. Our present system establishes a superintendency containing two elements, the episcopacy and the presiding eldership. These offices are the two parts of the same agency whose work is the

supervision of the Church. One is general, the other local. Each has its peculiar value, each supplements the other, and both are indispensable to the intelligent direction of the affairs of the Church. In the present arrangement there is a division of the labor to be done and the responsibility to be borne. The one officer visits every part of his district four times a year, seeing, hearing, examining, advising, aiding in all practicable ways. Meeting in the council at the conference, he narrates, explains, and suggests, and the bishop inquires, judges, and determines. The one gathers the materials, the other builds.

To proceed safely and judiciously in stationing the pastors, the appointing power must be in possession of full and accurate information in regard to the abilities and circumstances of the ministers, and the condition and the wants of the several societies. To provide this information is now one of the most important duties of the presiding elder. To weigh it carefully and use it wisely in the marshaling of the clerical force

is the most important duty of the bishop. If this assignment of the work to be done is to remain unchanged, a small number of bishops will continue to be able to perform the part which falls to them. If the bishop is to be required to secure all needed information by a personal inspection of every part of the field, two results will follow: the office of presiding elder will be superseded and abolished, and the Church will require about as strong a numerical force of bishops as it now needs of presiding elders. This would be in effect to merge the two offices, and make presiding elders of the bishops and bishops of the presiding elders, creating a multitude of pigmy prelates, whose higher title would in no wise increase either their dignity, or their value to the Church.

But while the merging of the two offices would not lessen the number of men needed for the work of supervision, and consequently would accomplish nothing in the way of economizing our resources of men or money, the project is objectionable on still other grounds. No wise man would be

willing to undertake to perform the duties of both offices at once. The responsibilities of the presiding elder, as the office is now constituted, are delicate and weighty. He is expected to form just estimates of the preachers, and of the requirements of the Churches, representing the men fairly, and planning the work with judgment and skill. He is constantly among the preachers and also the people, and there is opportunity for kindnesses and collisions, for friendships and alienations, for the play of all the influences, subtle or palpable, whereby men are drawn together, or drift away from each other. It is right, therefore, that his acts shall be closely scanned, lest from these sources there comes something to sway his conclusions, some finger to touch the balances and make the less seem the greater. Yet the presiding elder does not assign fields of labor. He furnishes information and makes suggestions only; and he does this in the presence of other elders whose duty is to supply what is lacking in the statements made, and question what seems erroneous in the coun-

sels offered, and thus arrest hasty action and avert mistake.

But if the bishop takes upon him the duties of the presiding elder in addition to his own, he bears a burden immeasurably greater than that which pertains to either office. The possibilities of friendships and alienation, of kindnesses and collisions, remain the same as in the case of the elder, and there is no third agency, out of the reach of personal antagonism and prejudice, to which there may be appeal. He himself must settle every question, deciding the fortunes of preacher and people. The preachers and the people know this fact, and as he goes about in his diminutive territory, he is plied at every point with the solicitations of those who seek favors for themselves or their friends, and who will hold him personally responsible for every disappointment of their hopes. The result is easily foretold. Beset by the ministry on one side and the laity on the other, ground between the upper and the nether millstones of his sympathies and his duty, he would be more than

mortal if he was not compelled, sooner or later, to adopt the expedient of putting the parties in direct communication with each other, and telling them to make their own arrangements. Thus the bishop, only a pigmy at the beginning, would dwindle to the still smaller dimensions of an ecclesiastical middleman, a clerical broker, whose sole business is to bring the buyers and the sellers face to face, and smile serenely while they chaffer over their bargains. To merge the two offices, whether you call the incumbent bishop or presiding elder, would lay upon him a weight which would speedily grind the ill-starred device to powder.

On the present plan, the burden of responsibility which rests upon the presiding elder is great. He deals with the holy concerns of God's Church. Thousands of immortal souls feel, for good or evil, the action which he takes. He aids in assigning to his brethren positions which, in their view, stamp life itself with the mark of success or failure. But no list of appointments, however faithfully and patiently studied and arranged,

looks exactly right at every point either to bishop or elder, preachers or people. Here a preacher is set down for a place where the wants of his family cannot be adequately supplied ; there a Church receives a pastor who for some cause, real or imaginary, is already in disfavor among the people. When the list is read before the conference, the announcement of a name here and there along the line will fall like a knell upon some eager ear, and carry sadness and dismay to an honest heart and a tearful household. Work as long as you will over the tangle of interests, and the result is the same. To lift the burden at one point is only to lay it down at another ; and after the bishop and his council have spent the slow hours of the midnight again and again, only to find that *that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered*, they must be content to solace themselves, and others if they are able, with the reflection that the best that could be has been done, and that, at all events, things are fixed for one year only,

and there are possibilities beyond. If the duties of the office are so onerous, when shared with five or seven able, honored brethren, what would they be if one man must himself go every-where, listen to every body, learn every thing, weigh every thing, decide every thing, and be solely responsible for every thing?

The present method of dividing the labor and the responsibility affords a just relief to the bishop. The fact that he is a stranger to the great majority of those with whose interests he deals makes him the freer from embarrassment in the performance of his official duty. When he pays his annual visit to examine the field and assign the laborers their places, there is not much chance even for suspicious minds to imagine that any preacher secures favors through the personal friendship of the presiding officer, or that any layman, for a similar reason, finds a private interview peculiarly efficacious. Even when not in itself wholly satisfactory, his action is criticised with less asperity because there is so

little ground on which to base a charge of prejudice or partiality.

The division of the responsibility of stationing the preachers is more satisfactory to the Churches. If any one man, without consultation or advice, acting wholly on his own personal knowledge of things, is to attempt it, there will be popular apprehension, if he is a stranger, that he knows too little of local circumstances ; if he is not a stranger, that those who know him best will find readiest access to his ear and have the most potent voice in determining his action.

To multiply bishops, therefore, with a view of laying upon them the sole responsibility of stationing the preachers, looks like a predestinated failure, and a dangerous one at that. It is a path into which it may not be difficult to venture, but from which I see no way of return. To multiply bishops that we may see them at every dedication, and on every unusual occasion, would squander the resources of the Church. Moreover, the very men who might be made into additional bishops are already in existence, willing

to aid their brethren without waiting to be clothed upon with episcopal dignities; and it is doubtful whether the addition of the official title would lend enough new attraction to their names, or unction to their deliverances, to compensate for the enormous added expense.

The plan of electing bishops, not for life, but for a term of four or eight years, is not wise.

The continual agitation involved in the arrangement would be detrimental to the peace and unity in the Church. If the bishops, elected for a certain term of years, were made by law ineligible for a second term, then would the Church lose the advantage of retaining in continuous service the men best fitted for it by experience as well as gifts and grace; every General Conference would bring its elections, candidates would multiply, each with his circle of admirers about him, on the look-out for chances to buy votes with votes; and there is reason to fear that in the conference itself there would be found those who would pay less

attention to the great interests of the Church than to the plots and counterplots in which they were engaged.

To make the bishops eligible for a second term would be attended by both good and evil results. It would probably lessen the number of candidates, but would open the door to other elements of discord. The office is naturally regarded as very desirable, and those in possession of it would inevitably be suspected of using, and in fact would be strongly tempted to use, means to secure a re-election; and few would pass through the ordeal unharmed in reputation. The discussion of incumbents and candidates would be perpetual, without a single year of silence and rest in the quadrennium, and the very atmosphere around prominent men be full of suspicion. In the rugged experiences of our system the preachers are not always sure that the appointing power has treated them with perfect fairness. There floats about a faint whisper, occasionally, to the effect that this brother has been favored, somewhat at the expense of

that one. If an experience of this kind should follow close upon a contest in which the favored one was an ardent advocate of the election of the bishop who showed the favor, and the other who complains of ill usage, his equally ardent opponent, and the enthusiastic supporter of his rival, what hope is there, in this present evil world, that the charge would not find believers?

Tolerably good men sometimes persuade themselves into the doing of strange things. Make the Church the arena of perpetual elections, and the inevitable result will be combinations and electioneering schemes. Every prominent candidate will have his circle of friends and active supporters; and when the election is over it will be very natural for the successful aspirant to remember who his admirers were and who were his opponents, and what measures they were suspected of employing. Even if he were so magnanimous as to try to forget it all, and make no distinction between those who favored his election and those who strongly opposed it, it would be very natural for

others not to give him credit for such exalted virtue. The approach of a second election would increase the suspicion, because it would be evident that the adherents who had done such valuable service on one occasion would soon be needed for another.

This state of things would lay the bishops open to attack on every side, and supply both motives and weapons for the war. It would at the same time make the bishop timid in the performance of his official duties, and factious men bold in censuring and resisting his action. The moral power of the office would be gone. And, worst of all, if at any future time, and from any cause, parties should form in the Church, these incessant elections would become a field of strife, the animosities and the strategy of which would be akin to those of political campaigns, only more discreditable and disastrous because of the higher profession of the rival factions, and the more delicate nature of the interests involved.

The plan of assigning the bishops their

several districts for a stated term of years is not visibly open to any very grave objections; nor do we see in it the promise of any great good. It would enable the bishops to become more thoroughly acquainted each with his own particular field, and thus it might occasionally work to advantage. On the other hand, it might tend in some degree to impair our unity of action, and make it less broad and comprehensive, to localize men and resources, and possibly, at some time, and in some way not now foreshadowed, lead different sections of our communion into collision over men or measures, or the collection or the application of funds intended for the furtherance of the general work. The seeds of civil war were sown in our land the very hour when those fatal phrases "The North" and "The South" were invented. I am not sure that the measure in question would involve any serious degree of sectional tendency; but it will be safe to examine that point before we adopt the plan. Perhaps the formal districting of the bishops for the period of four years may

be desirable to prevent the informal districting for still longer periods.

The last of the possible changes named in our list is the proposition to take from the episcopal office certain of the responsibilities which pertain to it and locate them elsewhere. The practical measures proposed are, first, the election of presiding elders by the annual conferences instead of their appointment by the bishop; and, second, the constituting of the presiding elders the council of the bishop, and the formal bestowment upon them of a voice in the stationing of the preachers. The consideration of these questions belongs as properly to another part of this discussion as to this point. We will, therefore, examine them hereafter, merely observing here, that while the Methodist movement assumed in its early stages, and even in some of its permanent features, the form of an oligarchy, yet this form was adopted only as a means to an end, and that a decided democratic tendency is visible all along the line of its history. For many years Wesley was, of necessity, the autocrat

of British Methodism; but as the work spread, and able men grew up around him, the management of its rapidly accumulating interests was shared by them more and more, until, in 1784, the Deed of Declaration formally placed in the possession of the conference important powers which Wesley had long held in his single hand. In like manner Asbury was the autocrat of the American Societies, until, in 1784, the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church exalted him to the office of a bishop, and by the same act reduced him to the position of a mere executive officer of the conference. From that time to this, whenever our legislation has touched the episcopal office it has been with the intent of distributing elsewhere its rapidly increasing burdens.

Reserving this matter for examination in another chapter, I hold, upon the points already considered, and for the reasons thus briefly stated, that the interests of the Church and the cause of God, so far as they are intrusted to our hands, will be best secured by keeping the numerical strength

of the episcopate at the lowest possible limit consistent with its efficiency as the main element of the appointing and executive agencies of the Church, and at the same time retaining the life term of service intact, and the various duties and responsibilities of the office chiefly as they are now defined in our book of Discipline.

In regard to the qualifications of one called to "the office and work of a bishop," there is little room for difference of opinion. He needs to be a thoroughly religious man, clearly apprehending and firmly holding the great doctrines of God's word, and showing in his character and life the fruits of intelligent and mature piety. It is desirable that he should be able to do effective service in the pulpit and on the platform, and that all his conduct, public and private, should be such as to win the love, the respect, and the confidence of the wise and the good. Still, in addition to all this, it must be remembered that the office is essentially executive, and that the gravest duty pertaining to it is the annual allotment of ministerial service. A

failure here is a total failure, fatal to the man and disastrous to the Church. A bishop, therefore, needs to be wise, dispassionate, patient, unwearied in duty, rigidly just to all parties, and religiously faithful in all things.

The office of a bishop among us is one of dignity and responsibility. It is true that our episcopacy exists, not from the notion that it is in any way essential to a true Church, but because Methodism providentially crystallized in this form, and finds it practically her best form. In fact, the organic law of our Church contains an express provision, by virtue of which the episcopacy may be abolished at any time; and it remains as we find it to-day, simply because the Church has seen no cause to lay it aside, or introduce radical changes. Among all the men on this earth of ours, few are trusted as are the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, few deal with interests of such magnitude, or stand where integrity of character and practical wisdom are so essential. The power conferred upon them is very

great, and in important directions is as nearly absolute as any thing in all the land, in Church or State. And all this, too, is held, not for any set period but for life.

And power in the Church as well as the State has in it a fascination of which most men are quite susceptible. All to whom it is entrusted need to be on their guard against the effects which often follow its long-continued possession, and see to it that as it grows familiar to them, they become none the less careful and conscientious in the exercise of it. The surgical novice, performing his first important operation, feels such a sympathy for the patient, and such a burden of anxiety in regard to the result, that the mental pain of the one is almost as hard to bear as the physical suffering of the other; but a few years of professional life may so transform him that he stands unmoved and smiling amid scenes which would have appalled and unnerved him at the beginning. So a bishop who, while new to the office, is distressed very possibly more than reason demands by every murmur of preach-

er or people, may in time learn to turn a deaf ear to their loudest complaints, and even find satisfaction in reflecting that, complain as they may, they are powerless.

Moreover, as years pass on, the sensibilities become less acute, care and labor more wearisome, the intellect less alert to detect the evidence of mistake, and perhaps less willing to admit the possibility of it; and thus anxiety tends to subside into ease and indifference. For these reasons, while our bishops are gathering up the golden fruits of experience, it is not unwise for them to feel that they need to be on their guard lest evil inadvertently mingle with the good.



CHAPTER VI.

THE PRESIDING ELDERSHIP—ITS ORIGIN AND VALUE.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. I TIM. v, 17.

PHILIP EMBURY preached his first sermon in 1766. The Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1784. During this period of eighteen years the societies were in an anomalous state. They were rapidly assuming the proportions of a Church, and at the close of the period named had already enrolled eighty-three faithful, successful pastors, and fifteen thousand earnest and consistent members. And still these were not a Church in form, but were considered, by a sort of fiction, to be members of the Church of England.

It was not without difficulty that the fiction was maintained. The people were not

able to understand why those ministers by whose faithful labors they had been brought to Christ could not baptize them, and administer the Lord's Supper. The preachers themselves could not see why the work to which they had been called failed, in their case, to include all the functions of the ministerial office. And when the war of Independence began, and the ministers of the Episcopal Churches nearly all returned to England, leaving their flocks in many cases wholly destitute of public religious privileges, the Methodists urged still more strongly a complete Church organization. They complained, more and more loudly, that there were no sacraments at the altars where they worshiped, and that, if they would commemorate the dying of their Lord, or dedicate their children to God in baptism, they must ask it as a favor at the hands of the ministry of other Churches which had borne no part in leading them to Christ, and to which they owed no allegiance. The marvel is, indeed, that this natural tendency to ecclesiastical independence should be success-

fully resisted for so long a time, especially during a contest for civil independence.

But on this point Mr. Wesley had been firm, and Mr. Asbury, as a faithful son in the Gospel, adhered to his instructions. At the first conference, which was held in 1773, in Philadelphia, nine preachers being present, the following rules were unanimously adopted:—

1. "Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley, and the brethren who labor in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2. "All the people among whom we labor are to be earnestly exhorted to attend the Church, and to receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner to press the people of Maryland and Virginia to the observance of this minute."

This action shows clearly that Mr. Asbury was endeavoring to establish in America the same theory that Mr. Wesley was inculcating in England, to wit: that the Methodist societies were in no sense of the term a

Church ; but, if they had any Church relation at all, were only voluntary associations of certain members of the Episcopal Church. In America, however, this notion never struck very deep root, and from the very beginning there were those who rejected it. Even the vast influence of Asbury was not able to secure universal compliance with the rigid action which has been cited. Robert Strawbridge, the zealous local preacher who laid the foundations of Methodism in Maryland, refused outright to consider the rules obligatory, and acting on his own fixed convictions, went on baptizing his converts and their children, and administering the eucharist to his people. And when the war began, and Mr. Asbury for a time retired from the work, and many of the English rectors of the Episcopal Churches fell under the suspicion of toryism, the desire for ecclesiastical independence received a new impulse, and, especially in Maryland and Virginia, became too strong to be controlled.

At the conference held at Fluvanna, Virginia, in May, 1779, the question of organ-

ization was discussed, and the decision was in favor of immediate action. Mr. Asbury was not present. Four of the preachers, Messrs. Gatch, Foster, Ellis, and Cole, were by vote constituted a "Presbytery." They first ordained each other, with the laying on of hands, and then proceeded to ordain certain others. None but the preachers engaged in the southern part of the work were present to take part in the transaction. For the space of a year, they continued to exercise the powers thus assumed, and prospered greatly in their ministry.

But the preachers north of Virginia hesitated to break away from the advice and the authority of Wesley and Asbury, and the next year, 1780, prevailed upon the Southern brethren to delay for more general consultation, and especially till they heard once more from Mr. Wesley. For the sake of harmony, the administration of the sacraments was laid aside for the time, and the delay was prolonged until 1784, when the question was effectually settled by the organization of the Methodist Episcopal

Church, and the ordination, on Sunday, January 2, 1785, of twelve elders and one deacon.

The Discipline of the Church, as adopted by the conference of 1784, has the following question and answer:—

“Question 30. What is the office of an elder?”

“Answer. To administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and to perform all the other rites prescribed by our Liturgy.”

The societies were divided into twelve districts, and to each of these an elder was assigned for the performance of the duties of the office. It is evident that the elder, as his powers were originally defined, possessed no authority over the preachers of his district. The office was created, not for the oversight of the work, but to supplement a pastorate not fully empowered for its position. The preachers in general had not been formally authorized to perform certain functions of a regular ministry, and the elder came to supply their lack.

But the want of some additional administrative agency began to be felt. The oversight of the work devolved solely upon Mr. Asbury, whose travels took so wide a range that his visits at any one locality were very brief, and the intervals between them very long. Communication by letter was also at that time slow and uncertain. There was need of some new agency, intermediate between the bishop and the preachers, that would be within reach at all times, to supervise the affairs of the societies, and deal with current events. This matter was discussed at the conference held in the spring of 1784, and the conclusion was embodied in the following minute:—

“Question 8. How shall we keep good order among the preachers, and provide for contingencies in the vacancy of conference, and the absence of the General Assistant?”

“Answer. Let any three assistants do what may be thought most eligible, call to an account, change, suspend, or receive a preacher till conference.”

This curious provision, which gave to any

three preachers in charge of circuits the power to deal with things of vital importance to both preachers and people, was manifestly imperfect and of doubtful utility. In the spring of 1786 another more successful attempt was made to supply the need, and the following was added to the definition of the duties of the elder:—

“2. To exercise within his own district, during the absence of the superintendents, all the powers invested in them for the government of our Church. Provided that he never act contrary to an express order of the superintendents.”

Thus the office of presiding elder was created. Like the Methodist episcopacy, it sprung into existence full grown, and clothed with powers which, as the general ministry as well as the laity grew in strength, required diminution rather than increase. The power of an elder was, in fact, greater than that of a bishop at the present day. The term “presiding” was not employed at that time, because there were no elders except those assigned to the districts. As time passed

on, however, ordinations multiplied, and it became necessary to make a distinction between the elders assigned to districts and those who traveled circuits only; and in 1797, the title presiding elder was made the permanent official designation of those who exercise supervision over districts.

Thus, wholly without human forethought or design, a new office grew up and took its place among the instrumentalities of the Church. If we look back to see what the office was in 1784, and then compare it with the presiding eldership of the present day, we see that an almost total change has taken place. The causes which established it in 1784 are no longer sufficient to sustain it in every part of the work. The great majority of our pastors are now ordained elders, and have no need that any other minister should visit them periodically for the purpose of administering the sacraments. In the case of an unordained pastor, an exchange of pulpits for a day with an ordained neighbor, or the presence and aid of a local elder, supplies the required service.

But while the reason which originated the establishment of districts and the first appointment of elders has gradually lost its force, another element of efficiency and value remains unimpaired, and even grows in importance, as the labors and interests of the Church grow in number, variety, and magnitude. Prior to its organization in 1784, the government of the rising Church was exceedingly imperfect. Mr. Asbury came to America in 1771, and the next year was appointed "assistant," or general superintendent, by Mr. Wesley. For the next twelve years all power was vested in him. But while his authority was theoretically without limit, it was very effectually limited by the nature of his labors. The area over which he traveled enlarged as the work grew, and he soon found himself unable to visit each individual society even once a year. The preachers met him at conference, where for the space of two or three days he examined the interests of the societies, counseled, exhorted, directed, planned the labors of the preachers, assigned each his field, and

then went his way, and was seen there no more till his next annual visit. The preachers, most of whom were young and inexperienced, went to their circuits, each to do his work in his own way. Within the limits of his circuit the preacher stood alone, with no Church agency within reach to counsel the perplexed, cheer the desponding, or restrain the erratic.

The organization was evidently incomplete and inadequate to the needs of the societies, and earnest search was made for some mode of filling the void. The plan hastily adopted early in 1784, clothing "any three assistants" with powers of supervision and control, was a poor piece of legislation. Its failure to point out with precision the three who should act in a given case was in itself a fatal defect, of necessity leading in some cases to inaction, and in others to collisions of authority.

Imperfect as are the records of those early times, there is evidence that not a little irregularity existed, and that there was enough of it, not only to annoy the judicious,

but to hinder the success of the work. In 1782 there appears in the Minutes a reference to "disorderly traveling preachers," another to "disorderly local preachers," and a third to "impostors," and action was taken in regard to each class of disturbers. In the spring conferences of 1784, the question was formally brought forward for discussion, "How shall we keep good order among the preachers?"

The legislation of 1786, which directed the elder, in the absence of the bishops, to exercise, within his district, "all the powers invested in them for the government of our Church," thus grew out of the pressing want of more thorough supervision than the bishops found themselves able to exercise over the constantly extending field of their labors.

The history, therefore, of the presiding eldership, the necessities in which it originated, as well as the terms in which its duties are defined, show that it is an adjunct or supplement of the episcopacy, an inherent part of the supervisory agency of the Church.

It can hardly be called a device of men. It seems, rather, to have grown up providentially, just as class meetings, the itinerant system, episcopacy, and, in fine, almost every peculiar feature of Methodism, grew up and took their places in the organization. It has held its place, without essential change, for eighty-eight years, and through all this period has abundantly vindicated its right to be. The elements of its efficiency are numerous.

1. The presiding eldership is an efficient agency for the performance of a work which is essential to the maintenance of a true itinerancy.

The Methodist idea of itinerancy includes much more than a limited term of pastoral service and constant changes. The great principle upon which it is based is that the ministry exists for the sake of the work, and that those who are truly called of God to the work are more anxious to glorify God and save souls than to secure ease, social position, or any earthly reward for themselves. There may be a kind of itinerancy

in which, instead of this generous, intelligent self-abnegation there is perpetual appeal to self-regard. A system which limits the term of pastoral service, and at the same time provides no wise, impartial method for the distribution of ministerial labors, places both pastors and people in a position fraught with temptation. The selfish principle will prompt men to scheme and struggle for what are deemed the best places. The rich Churches, with their ample salaries, pleasant social features, and moderate service, will be sought after, while those in unattractive locations, where the support is inadequate, the work hard, and society uncongenial, will be avoided. Thus will arise a sharp competition for place, which will prove too powerful for the virtue of some. This one will be tempted to apply himself to the acquisition of a showy oratory which attracts the volatile and elicits applause. That one will court the favor of the influential men of the various Churches upon which he has fixed his eye, and seek to worm his way along by their friendly aid. An-

other will form a secret alliance with a few of his ministerial brethren, and when at any time he needs a new field of labor, he will urge the excellencies of his special friends upon the attention of his Church, with the understanding that they shall do him the same kind service in their several places. And among preachers and people schemes will conflict, and men come into sharp collisions which destroy love and confidence, the successful becoming arrogant with success, and the defeated growing sour with failure. An itinerant system which is not based upon a plan which challenges the confidence of all parties, is dangerous to the best interests of ministers and people.

If, therefore, the itinerancy in its true comprehensive spirit is to be maintained, the presiding eldership, or some equivalent agency, is indispensable. There must be men whose duty is to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the condition and requirements of the Churches, and the talents, the circumstances, and the peculiar practical abilities of the preachers, and thus be able

to state accurately and counsel wisely in the stationing of the pastors, so that the ministerial forces of the Church shall be employed to the best advantage. No such accurate and full information can be acquired without constant contact and communication with the preachers and the people. The field of supervision assigned the man upon whom the duty is laid must be small, the official visitations frequent, and his own interests as little liable as possible to be involved in his action.

But I am persuaded not only that the details of superintendency must be carefully attended to in order to success, but that the presiding eldership is the best agency for the performance of the work. To reduce the size of the district, and make one of the pastors chairman, is to undermine the foundations of a broad system of itinerancy, and inaugurate, gradually perhaps, but none the less certainly, a totally different method, by which the several Churches and pastors will arrange for themselves, each in his own way. To call upon the bishops to do all of this

work themselves is to multiply their numbers so that there is no economy of men or money, and at the same time to load the office with embarrassments now unknown to either presiding elders or bishops. The bishop, too, is elected for a life service. The presiding elder is selected from among the pastors, and after a brief term of service again becomes a pastor. Thus the supervisory officers of the Church are divided into two classes, a small number of bishops who hold their office by the life tenure, and a larger body of presiding elders appointed for a limited time. Thus the more numerous branch of the superintendency is only a short remove from the great body of the ministry. Thus distinctions in the ministry are lessened, and an efficient superintendency maintained in its least objectionable form.

2. It secures for the work of local supervision men who by their thorough acquaintance with the preachers and the people, and practical knowledge of pastoral duty, are best prepared to perform the office.

We believe that an independent appointing power is a necessary part of a true itinerancy. The appointing agency cannot do its work intelligently and well, unless it has minute and accurate information in regard to the qualifications of the preachers and the state of the Churches. This information is gathered most effectively by those who have had recent experience in the pastoral office, and expect after a brief period to return to it. They understand the toils, the trials, the anxieties, the holy joys, the evil and the good, which attend the work of the minister. They have a clearer insight into the causes of what is evident success, or what seems failure, on the part of the pastor, and a deeper, more intelligent sympathy with those who are placed in positions of difficulty. Their own past history is a wise interpreter of passing events on their district. Their close and continual contact with the common people, as well as with the pastors, keeps them thoroughly informed; every current of thought and feeling reaches them, and their sympathies stretch out to

every pastor, every Church member, every child in the Sabbath-school, every soul that loves God, and every sinner to whom the good tidings of joy are sent.

The bishops, on the other hand, are seldom taken directly from the pastoral work. They hold their office by a life tenure. Their supervisory work is general rather than minute. Their position makes their society sought for among the wealthy and the influential, and from the moment of their election they steadily drift away from the people. It is wise, then, to construct the appointing power of two elements, one of which comes directly from the pastoral work, and from closest contact with the people.

3. The presiding eldership secures constant and thorough oversight of all the interests of the Church.

Four times in the year the presiding elder comes and observes the advantages or disadvantages of the location, examines the condition of the church property, and notes what is deficient in the accommodations of

the congregation, the social meetings, or the Sabbath-school. He converses with the pastor, and with active members of the society, and weighs the statements made and the opinions expressed. He convenes the Quarterly Conference, and makes minute inquiry into every department of Church work, and every element of Church efficiency. The pastor reads a report of his labors, and of the state of the society and the Sabbath-school. Inquiry is made in regard to the finances of the Church, as they come under the supervision either of the trustees or of the stewards, and affect the support of the minister or the condition of the property. It is also ascertained what degree of attention is paid to the benevolent enterprises of the Church, and with what degree of vigor the society is doing its work.

The office, too, has a direct and important connection with the administration of Church law. The trial of a private member of the society for alleged wrong conduct often disturbs a whole community, exciting passion, creating dissention, and even involving the

pastor in suspicions of partiality, or want of skill to manage the case. The aggrieved member appeals to the Quarterly Conference for redress; and the presiding elder, who has hitherto had no connection with the matter, presides in the interests of impartial justice to all concerned. So in the case of a local preacher, charged with offenses of any kind, not the pastor, who may be involved in the local trouble and excitement, but the presiding elder, conducts the trial, and is responsible for its right management.

Such a review as this, made at stated periods and as a matter of duty, cannot fail to do good. Moreover, the duties of the presiding elder reach beyond mere inquiry. If defects are discovered, he must kindly, but candidly, point them out. If the pastor in any way fails to measure up to the requirements of his charge, the elder must, if possible, aid him. If the office-bearers of the society are negligent, he must urge them to action. The fact that the laws of the Church call upon him to make these inquiries, not only causes them to be re-

sponded to in a loyal and kind spirit, but stirs up the Church in advance to get things into the best possible shape for the inspection. Thus the quarterly visits of the presiding elder, and the stated inquiries in regard to all the affairs, spiritual and temporal, of the society, tend to encourage the active, rouse the negligent, and promote energy and efficiency in every direction. The Quarterly Conference is never without value, even when nothing but routine business is transacted, and the minutes seem to contain little of importance.

This close systematic supervision is especially valuable where the pastor and his chief laymen are young and without experience. In our rapidly growing body, many pastors are thus young, and with little experience in conducting the affairs of a religious society. Some are painfully conscious that they are only partially prepared to assume the pastoral office. To these especially the stated visits of the presiding elder are of great value, as regards both their public duty and their own personal concerns.

4. The presiding eldership provides for a better administration of ecclesiastical discipline than could otherwise be secured.

The rapid growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the tendency, every-where apparent, to lay aside the system of circuits, and limit pastoral charges to single societies, compel an equally rapid increase of the numerical force of the ministry. Thus many of our pastors have little experience in the administration of Church law, and consequently often need counsel in regard to the proper management of affairs. They also need moral support where the enforcement of discipline is resisted.

Such cases do sometimes occur. Perhaps some influential member of the Church is found implicated in transactions which our discipline condemns, or addicted to practices which our rules forbid. The pastor converses with him, and finds no disposition to abandon the wrong, or even admit that it is wrong. It may be evident that the offender fancies himself too important a member of the society, too valuable a part of its social

and especially its financial strength, to be in any danger of disciplinary action. Thus he deliberately places himself in opposition to the law of the Church, and perhaps declares in plain terms that the Church authorities need not concern themselves in regard to him or his doings. The other members of the society may grieve over the misconduct of their unruly brother, and feel that it is working serious evil; but they are timid, and averse to assuming responsibility.

In such a case, with the most influential member of his flock going astray, and refusing to heed his counsels, and the rest of the society silent and fearful, the young pastor is distressed and burdened in spirit. The devoted members of the Church are in sorrow; the less earnest among the membership take courage from the evil example set them, and grow more careless and worldly than ever, and the young and inexperienced look on, and wonder and doubt, and are tempted. The openly irreligious part of the community find in this state of things weapons both for attack upon the Church and

religion itself, and for defense when they are rebuked for their sins. The pastor, too, is conscious that his own position in the conference, and before the community, is not yet assured, and that it is easy for him to raise a storm in which he may himself be wrecked.

Thus the pastor may be strongly tempted to suppress his convictions of duty, comforting himself with the reflection that the evils which he would fain redress grew up under the pastorate of other men, and flourished by their silence, and that it would be no credit to him to rush into a conflict which older ministers were careful to avoid. In such cases, the aid of a presiding elder who will calmly and firmly stand for the right, is of incalculable value. He has power to rally the sound portion of the society to the support of the pastor, reinforce the administration, maintain the supremacy of the law, and vindicate the reputation of the Church. His official position makes it his duty to declare his sentiments, and interpose, if need be, his authority, and thus the right

prevails, where otherwise defeat and failure would have been inevitable.

Sometimes the peril comes from another direction. The pastor may be impulsive, ill-balanced, ignorant of human nature, and of the proper modes of dealing with men. He may be over-sensitive, unduly anxious to assert his authority, and too careful to maintain what he considers the dignity of his position. He may find alienations and enmities among his people, and without a suspicion of the disastrous results put himself into the hands of the faction which is most active in courting his favor, and thus make himself a party to the quarrel which it is his business to bring, if possible, to an end. Here, again, the presiding elder may interpose in the interests of justice, and by his counsels, quietly given, save the pastor from errors which might injure his reputation, and the people from unjust and perhaps irregular disciplinary proceedings, and thus do a kindness to all parties, and rescue a holy cause from obloquy.

5. The presiding eldership is a powerful

agency for maintaining the general peace of the Church.

It must needs be that offenses come. The Church is not wholly perfect in love, and those who are perfect in love are not all perfect in wisdom. Good people, who are really on their way to heaven, are often a sore trial to each other. Not only in their business dealings, and in regard to what is just between man and man, but in respect to the interests of the Church itself, they differ in judgment and come into collision. And strange as it may seem, the greater the energy, and the more ardent the zeal of God's people in their pious labors, the greater the danger of ruptures over conflicting plans and measures. There is a peace which is born of indifference. The lake is never so calm as when it is frozen. And there is peril that attends activity and energy alone. Enginery is most liable to break when in swiftest motion. Where there is no umpire, no counselor, in such a position as to suggest at once an appeal to him, and trusted by all parties, the most

trifling divergence of opinion may grow into a difficulty which destroys friendship and brotherly love, rends the Church, sets censorious tongues in motion, and inflicts wounds that never heal.

The presiding elder is, *ex officio*, the friend and counselor of the pastor. In the hour of perplexity and agitation, when formidable difficulties have arisen, whether between pastor and people, or parties forming among the people, the presiding elder is at hand, with the weight of his official position and personal character, to intervene in the interests of peace. The pastor can seek the advice of the presiding elder and thus divide the responsibility in times of uncertainty. If the case is of such a character that no possible skill and caution are able wholly to avert evil consequences, the fact that the pastor sought counsel in the proper quarter, and heeded it, will save him from the censures which might otherwise fall upon him, and in the case of a young man whose reputation is not yet fixed, might prove fatal to his future usefulness. A counselor whom

one can at any time consult without intrusion, and whose advice his official relation renders it safe to follow, is a tower of strength to the inexperienced and the self-distrustful.

The presiding elder is equally the friend and counselor of the laity. He is interested in the welfare of every Church, and every member of every Church on his district. If wrong is done to the least of the flock, he desires to see matters set right. If error of any kind is committed, he wishes to see it corrected. Seeking the best good of all, his aim is to heal wounds, restore sundered friendships, and bind about the whole Church the golden bands of love and harmony. Thus the office is, in its very nature, and by virtue of the relations which it sustains to pastors and people, an agency of reconciliation and peace; an instrumentality, like the apparatus of the electrician, whose province is to conduct silently and harmlessly away the gathering fires which might otherwise flash in the baleful lightning, and utter their voice in the bursting thunder.

6. The presiding eldership is a valuable agency for the conservation of sound doctrine.

The field of theological learning and research is boundless; and no man can be expected to traverse every part of it with the same minuteness of examination, and the same completeness of mastery. Mental habits, too, are different, modes of reasoning vary, and what is evidence to one mind fails to convince another. Peculiarities of mind and character, so subtle as to escape the consciousness of the inquirer himself, often project themselves into men's beliefs, and draw to the reception and advocacy of a one-sided theology. Thus in a Church where there is substantial unanimity there will be a wide difference in the choice of topics and the whole style of preaching. And here and there one in the pursuit of truth will become perplexed, or even fall into error. The presiding elder is the friend of all his preachers, and they can converse with him freely and in confidence. If any preacher falls into serious mistake, the elder

must give such counsel, or take such a course, as will best preserve the peace of the society, and, if he may, avert evil from both pastor and people. He has no authority to force his own theological peculiarities upon his preachers; he is not to repress thought, nor silence inquiry, nor *make a man an offender for a word*, yet he is to see that the pastors preach nothing but *the faith once delivered to the saints*. Thus the young and the inquisitive have the constant aid of an older and more mature mind in their investigations, and by the aid of a borrowed experience, search for truth more wisely and with better success.

7. The presiding eldership is an efficient agency in the work of Church extension.

The theory of ecclesiastical polity which makes the individual congregation the only scriptural organization, tends to narrow views and narrow plans of labor. The pastor of the isolated Church desires to see the congregation numerous, the finances prosperous, and the Society strong at every point. If all things are satisfactory, he may con-

tinue in his position to the end of his life. He knows that crowded pews and abundant resources are very gratifying to his people, and tend to make his hold upon his place more secure. A large membership can also pay a more liberal salary, and yield larger perquisites of every kind. It is not in human nature to be wholly indifferent to these things. When the choice lies between a congregation of a hundred people, with a salary of five hundred dollars, and another of a thousand people, with a salary of five thousand dollars, most men will prefer the latter. And the larger stipend may be well employed by the pastor in the maintenance of his family, the education of his children, and in making moderate provision for old age and decaying powers; and he is not to be deemed altogether selfish and mercenary if he is somewhat slow to perceive the propriety of dividing the flock which he has toiled so long to gather. If he has reached middle life, he feels that he cannot go back to the beginning and repeat the labors which have built his Church.

For similar reasons the leading members of the Church are slow to take any action that will scatter present forces, and make larger demands upon their personal liberality and effort. Their very theory of Church government lessens their sense of responsibility in regard to things beyond their own narrow bounds.

It must be confessed that the same tendency inheres, more or less, in all systems. The temptation is to build a nest, and stay in it. A hundred families of intelligence and wealth combine their resources. They erect a beautiful house of worship, secure the services of an able pastor, and hire skillful musicians. All the appointments of their worship are pleasing; their opportunities for social life are ample, and they seem to have little need of any thing beyond their own borders. Thus they are tempted to rest, and leave the world in general to take care of itself. To send off a colony, to establish a new place of worship where it is needed, involves new effort, and new calls for time and money on the part of those

who remain, as well as new anxieties and sacrifices on the part of those who go into the enterprise. Thus the strength of social ties, attachment to a Church home, the love of ease, the dislike of care and anxiety, make men slow to move, and quick to discover lions in the way.

But in an itinerant system like ours these temptations are somewhat lessened. The pastor's connection with the Church to which he ministers is for a limited time only, and his removal from it is not a professional disaster. His personal interests prompt him to seek the welfare of the whole body rather than to confine his views to the narrow horizon of one society.

The presiding elder is especially bound to take broad views of the interests of religion. It is a part of his official duty to observe where new communities are forming, and there are openings full of promise. It is his duty to co-operate in all cases where he deems an advance movement judicious, and to give advice in regard to the location, the style of the edifice, and the various arrange-

ments for its erection. It is his duty to counsel adversely in case of premature or unwise projects, bad locations, ill-planned buildings, and schemes which, going beyond the means of the projectors, threaten unmanageable debt and final disaster. His official position enables him to render valuable aid in putting matters into right shapes, and securing movements at the right moment, on the one hand resisting a waste of the Church's resources on enterprises which are visionary and vain from the start, and on the other preventing the loss of golden opportunities.

In fine, the presiding elder occupies an office which contains possibilities of great efficiency. He is set for the accomplishment of a great work. In constant communication with the pastors, he is to counsel them as circumstances require, encourage them in their plans for mental and religious improvement, or for the good of their people, and sustain them in the maintenance of the Discipline, warning them against errors of administration, and reinforcing them by his

official influence, where there is resistance to the right. He is to be their personal friend and counselor, and the relation which in the economy of the Church he sustains to them invites confidence. They are free to consult him on all occasions, knowing that his personal friendship for them, and his interest in their work will lead him to sympathize with them in all the good and all the evil that befalls them, and to aid them in every way, and by all the means in his power.

The people, too, feel that the presiding elder belongs to them, watching for opportunities to aid them in every good work, and ready to share all their labors and rejoice in all their victories. He is to be an example of fidelity, of industry, of intelligent and steady zeal, of gentleness, patience, and brotherly kindness, and his whole weight of official influence and personal character should be felt in the direction of peace, progress, and loyalty to God and the right.



CHAPTER VII.

THE PRESIDING ELDERSHIP—SHALL THE OFFICE BE MADE ELECTIVE?

Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ. I COR. ix, 12.

IT is natural, and not unwise, that every part of a unique arrangement, dealing with vital interests, wielding so much power, and laden with so great responsibilities, should be closely examined. Even in matters pertaining to religion a people imbued with the spirit of liberty, and holding in their hands the word of God, will be slow to surrender the right of inquiry and discussion.

The early Methodists in America greatly rejoiced when elders were ordained to administer the sacraments among them, and the societies became an organized Church. They approved when the elders were constituted the superintendents of their several

districts. They did not fail, however, to examine the methods adopted, and various questions arose. One of the first of these questions related to the mode in which the presiding elder is designated for the office. Ought he to be appointed by the bishop or elected by the conference? In the solution of this problem there are two contrary analogies, both of which have had adherents almost from the beginning of our history.

On the one side, it is argued that the presiding elders are a part of the effective force placed in the hands of the bishop for the prosecution of the work of the Church; that our entire ecclesiastical structure is based on the principle that the bishops shall direct the labors of the whole body of the ministry, and that in order to employ this force to the best advantage the bishop must have the full control of it; therefore the presiding elder should be appointed by the bishop, neither preachers nor people in any way directing his choice.

On the other hand, it may be argued that the bishops, to whom pertains the general

oversight of the Church, and to whom for that purpose great powers are given, receive their authority by the suffrages of those who represent the whole Church; that the presiding elder is, in fact, a local bishop, exercising within the limits of his district every power belonging to the episcopal office except the right to ordain; and that as the general superintendent is elected by those who speak for the whole Church, so the presiding elder, who is the local superintendent, wielding, within his assigned field, the same authority, should also be elected by those among whom he is to exercise his office.

Of these two theories, the latter was at one period decidedly in the ascendant. At the General Conference of 1808, memorable as the last General Conference composed of the whole body of the ministry, a motion was made that the presiding elders should thereafter be elected by the annual conferences. After an able debate, the question was taken, and there were fifty-two votes in the affirmative and seventy-three in the negative. The first delegated General Con-

ference, in 1812, discussed the same motion at great length, and decided it again in the negative by a vote of forty-two to forty-five, the Genesee, New York, and Philadelphia delegates being unanimously in favor of the measure, the Southern delegates generally against it, and those from New England divided in sentiment.

Bishop Asbury had felt considerable solicitude in regard to the matter, as will appear from the following extract from a letter written by him to Rev. R. Birch, in December, 1811:—

“We have recommended the first Friday in May as a day of humiliation and fasting, that if we must have some radical changes (as some say) and transfer of some to appointing the principal officers in our Church government, the change may be of God, and not of men who have partially for years been their own bishops.”

Bishop Asbury also makes the following brief note in regard to the debate of 1812:

“After a serious struggle of two days in General Conference to change the mode of

appointing presiding elders, it remains as it was. Means had been used to keep back every presiding elder who was known to be favorable to appointments by the bishops, and long and earnest speeches have been made to influence the minds of the members Lee, Shinn, and Snethen were of a side, and these are great men."—*Journal*, May 17, 1812.

The records of this contest show that intense interest was felt on both sides. The men whom Bishop Asbury names were among the ablest and most influential in the conference. Some of the delegates, at least, had been elected on this very issue, and, as the bishop intimates, because they were in favor of the proposed change. When the question was put, only three delegates, out of a total of ninety, failed to record their vote, and yet the majority against the change was only three. Thus in 1808, when the measure was brought forward for the first time, the majority in the negative was twenty-one; the second trial of strength, in 1812, showed the parties to be nearly equal, and

the obvious inference was that four years more would see the measure adopted.

As had been anticipated by all parties, the General Conference of 1816 resumed the discussion, the following being the shape which the resolution had taken when the final vote was reached:—

“The bishop at an early period of the annual conference shall nominate an elder for each district, and the conference shall, without debate, either confirm or reject such nomination. If the person or persons so nominated be not elected by the conference, the bishop shall nominate two others for such vacant district, one of whom shall be chosen; and the presiding elder so elected shall remain in office four years, unless dismissed by the mutual consent of the bishop and the conference; but no presiding elder shall be removed from office during the term of four years, unless the reasons for such removal be stated to him in conference, which shall decide without debate in his case.”

It was also proposed to constitute the

presiding elders thus elected the council of the bishop in making the appointments of the preachers. The measure was again rejected, this time by a decided majority, there being thirty-eight in favor, and sixty-three against it.

Still the struggle went on, and at the General Conference of 1820 the measure was again defeated. By this time, however, the discussion began to assume a somewhat dangerous aspect, and an attempt was made to end the agitation by compromise. For this purpose a committee of six, three advocates, and three opponents of the elective plan, were appointed to confer with the bishops and devise some measure which the conference would accept as a settlement of the question. The bishops were also there in number, M'Kendree, George, and Roberts. Bishop M'Kendree was not in good health, and did not attend the meetings of the committee. Bishops George and Roberts met the six brethren, and there was a frank and full comparison of views, and a careful consideration of the whole subject,

resulting in substantial agreement, and, as it was supposed, ending the controversy. The committee, with the concurrence of the bishops, and without dissent among themselves, reported to the conference the following plan, recommending its adoption and insertion in the Discipline:—

1. “ That whenever in any Annual Conference there shall be a vacancy or vacancies in the office of presiding elder, in consequence of his four years’ having expired, or the bishop wishing to remove any presiding elder, or by death, resignation, or otherwise, the bishop or president of the conference, having ascertained the number wanted from any of these causes, shall nominate three times the number out of which the conference shall elect by ballot, without debate, the number wanted; provided, when there is more than one wanted, not more than three at a time shall be nominated, nor more than one at a time be elected. Provided, also, that in case of any vacancy or vacancies in the office of presiding elder in the interval of any annual conference, the bishop shall have

authority to fill the said vacancy or vacancies until the ensuing annual conference.

2. "That the presiding elders be and hereby are made the advisory council of the bishop, or president of the conference, in stationing the preachers."

It will be seen that the plan reported by the committee differs but little from the one which had just been rejected, yet it was adopted after a brief discussion by a vote of sixty-one to twenty-five, the most decisive vote given during the twelve years' debate. All parties in the conference itself now deemed the question settled, but opposition appeared in a new quarter. Joshua Soule, who had been elected to the episcopacy a week before this action was taken, declined ordination on the ground that the new legislation in regard to presiding elders was unconstitutional, tending to "do away with the episcopacy," by depriving the bishops of an important part of the power placed in their hands for the good of the Church. Bishop M'Kendree, also, who had hitherto been silent, came before the conference with a

formal protest against the new measure, as being contrary to the Restrictive Rules, and subversive of an efficient itinerancy.

The conference accepted the resignation of Mr. Soule, and seemed no wise moved from their purpose; but when the venerable M'Kendree, now in the fortieth year of his faithful ministry, and the senior bishop of the Church, entered his solemn protest, this determination was shaken. They refused, nevertheless, to reconsider their action. A motion finally prevailed to suspend the operation of the new law for four years. The next General Conference, in 1824, continued the suspension, although not a few of the delegates had been elected on that direct issue, and because they favored the new law. From this time the popular interest in the subject seems to have declined, for what reason we can hardly tell, and the General Conference of 1828 repealed the action of 1820, and thus closed a controversy which had lasted twenty years, and worn, at times, a very threatening aspect.

After a half century of comparative si-

lence, however, the discussion has been resumed. It is again proposed to make the office of presiding elder elective, and it therefore becomes necessary to examine the subject anew on its merits.

And here, at the very outset, a question occurs: If the office is to be made elective, who ought to vote? As our Church laws stand, the interests of both the ministry and the laity are intrusted to a third party, the episcopacy. But the bishops are elected to their office by the General Conference, a body composed of a certain number of ministers, elected by the ministry, and a certain number of laymen, elected by the laity. The two great parties to the ecclesiastical compact, therefore, unite in choosing the officers to whom the interests of all shall be intrusted. The bishop is, in form and in fact, the representative of both ministry and laity, constituted such by their united suffrages, and dealing with their interests with the consent and by the authority of both. Consequently the presiding elder, appointed by the bishop, receives his office from the

hands of the agent and representative of the whole Church, and thus becomes, in his own person, the representative of both ministry and laity. If, therefore, the presiding elders are to be elected, the laity as well as the ministry should have a voice in the matter.

If the presiding elders are to be made the advisory council of the bishop in stationing the preachers, this argument has additional weight. As the Discipline now stands, the entire responsibility of making the appointments rests upon the bishop. All that the law of the Church teaches in regard to the elder's duty in the case is that he shall "attend the bishops when present in his district, and give them, when absent, all necessary information, by letter, of the state of his district." When the bishop comes to hold the Annual Conference, the letter of the law does not bind him to call the elders together, or to ask any one of them a single question in regard to preachers or people. He is at liberty to secure "all necessary information" in his own way, and to make the appointments, if he will, against the unanimous

remonstrance of presiding elders, preachers, and Churches. The bishop, as the representative of the ministry and the laity, acts for the whole Church, and in his official sphere his will is absolute. This power is conferred upon him by the laws of the Church, and the suffrages of its delegates, clerical and lay. But if the presiding elders be made "the advisory council of the bishop in stationing the preachers," and any degree of authority be thus given them in this work, just so much is taken from the bishop. If the presiding elder is elected by the preachers alone, then he will represent them only, and be legally responsible to them alone. Consequently, just in the degree in which power passes from the hands of the bishop, elected by the joint suffrages of ministry and laity, and falls into the hands of presiding elders, elected by the ministry alone, the ministry enlarge the area of their own privileges, and encroach upon that of the laity. Moreover, the inequality is still further augmented by the fact that the presiding elder, if elected, as is proposed, for a limited period

only, and re-elected only as he pleases his constituents, is wholly in their power, and is bound to obey their behests, not only by the remembrance of the honors by them bestowed upon him in the past, but also by that peculiar style of gratitude which has been ironically described as a lively sense of favors to come. The conclusion, to my mind, is inevitable, that if the presiding elders are to be elected the voice of the laity must be heard, as it now is in the election of the bishops, and that the adoption of any other method of election would be a ground of just complaint on the part of the people.

Assuming that this point is conceded by the ministry, and a plan devised by which the laity may have a voice in the election of the presiding elder, the question still remains, Is the elective method the wisest?

The arguments adduced in its favor are that it will tend to lessen the power of the episcopacy, now alleged to be needlessly great, bring into the office of presiding elder a more acceptable class of men, and hold

them to a stricter accountability for their official action.

In regard to the first of these alleged reasons it may be affirmed that no efficient itinerant system can be maintained, unless a good degree of power is lodged somewhere; and that the Church has had little cause, hitherto, to distrust the episcopacy. Still, if a portion of that power can be wisely remanded to the body of the ministry and the laity, our republican modes of thinking favor the change.

In regard to the next point named, we would say, with all emphasis, that if incompetent men find their way into the office; if the presiding elder is careless of the interests of ministers or Churches; if he neglects his duties, spending in indolence the time which should be given to his work, or devoting it to his pleasures, his secular business, or his literary pursuits, he cannot be rebuked too soon for the wrong which he is doing to the cause of God. If he is full of prejudices, greatly overvaluing his personal friends, and as greatly underrating others

who happen to be outside of his special circle ; if he is selfish and scheming, perpetually contriving plans for the advancement of his own interests at the expense of others ; if he is vain, easily falling into the hands of those who fawn and flatter ; or timid, weakly sacrificing the right where to maintain it demands courage and firmness ; or passionate and headstrong, constantly stirring up evil passions and provoking needless strife ; or unequal to his position, knowing little of Church law, and lacking energy and practical wisdom in the management of affairs, it is clear that there ought to be some way to secure his speedy removal from office. The ballot, cast intelligently and in the fear of the Lord, would rectify the wrong.

And yet the elective method, like every thing human, has its perils, its liabilities to be abused. The question is not how the plan would operate in an ideal state of society and of the Church, but how will it work in unfavorable circumstances, where all its capabilities of perversion are brought out ? Taking human nature as we find it, it might

sometimes prove disastrous. Unanimity of choice would be of rare occurrence, division of sentiment the rule. Sundry candidates would be named for every vacancy, each surrounded by his circle of friends, busy in advocating his claims and questioning those of his rivals. Elections naturally produce inquiry and discussion. Discussion easily degenerates into undue laudation of one candidate and the depreciation of the others. Preference easily changes to partisanship and leads to electioneering. In some cases, it is to be feared, men would form the habit of being active on such occasions, and thus, by degrees, a class of Church politicians would come into existence who would not scruple to borrow the arts and devices of worldly party strife, forming secret combinations, making secret promises, and adopting measures of questionable fairness and honor for the purpose of carrying out their schemes.

After a struggle of this character all parties would be apt to show the ill effects of it. The successful candidate is surrounded by

his band of partisans, who claim the credit of his election, and feel emboldened by the service which they have rendered to state their wishes, and press their personal demands with an openness and persistence which he finds very embarrassing. On the other hand, the defeated party will be tempted to doubt the impartiality of the presiding elder thus elected, and to watch his action with so sharp an eye that they can hardly fail to discover something of which to complain. If, in the process of making the appointments, two brethren, one the zealous friend of the successful candidate, and the other one who had worked hard to defeat him, are named for the same desirable station, and their claims and fitness, in the nicest judgment of impartiality, are equal, how is the question to be settled? If the friend is preferred, it will be regarded as an exhibition of the grossest favoritism, and a loud cry be raised against the outrage. If the opponent is preferred, the presiding elder is in danger of losing his friend, and scattering the party that elected him.

In fact, the presiding elder may be led into temptation by the very plans devised to make him feel his responsibility to his brethren. Offenses must needs come. The appointments of an entire conference can never be made satisfactory to all concerned. Here, a preacher feels that he has been placed below his true level, or that his reasonable request has not been heeded. There, a Church suspect that the preacher of their choice has been spirited away from them by unfair means. But suppose the tenure of the office so changed that the presiding elder must beware of the censures, the influence, and the votes of his brethren. The appeal thus being made to his fears, will he not be secretly tempted to ask himself what class of men it is most dangerous for him to offend? Whom, then, shall he fear, the modest, the unassuming, the self-sacrificing, or the ambitious, the self-asserting, the self-seeking, the restless spirits who always have some scheme in hand, and who know just how to set to work to pull down those that displease them? Is it wise to place the

elder where this question will even occur to his thoughts?

Let the appointing power be never so conscientious in the discharge of duty, there will be disappointment and dissatisfaction in individual cases. And when repeated elections have given rise to parties, on what principle of human nature will we base the hope that the presiding elder will neither carry, nor be suspected of carrying, into his official action the remembrance of the fact, that certain men labored hard to elect him, and certain others opposed him with zeal, bitterness, and even injustice? And then, other elections are coming. How can the elder fail to be distrusted? Even under the present system men are sufficiently critical and prone to suspicion. But if, while there is no visible reason to suspect, there is nevertheless suspicion, how will it be when these things follow an election attended with excitement and strife, during the progress of which perhaps unkind words were uttered and unwise things were done? It is evident that a real or fancied wrong, when it

can be so plausibly attributed to a dishonorable motive, will be infinitely more irritating and dangerous to the peace of the Church.

Another consideration, whose importance can scarcely be overrated, must also be remembered. Our Church organization is peculiar. It holds preachers and people together in one of the closest and most compact of human brotherhoods. Confidence in each other's integrity and honor is the cement of our union, the band which undergirds our good ship. If this is destroyed, we become an ecclesiastical wreck. In some other denominations, the union of parts is less perfect, and there is less of interdependence. In the Congregational system, each society, with its pastor, claims to be a complete Church, defining its doctrines, and administering its affairs in its own way. It may have fellowship with other Churches, or not, at its own option. It is an organism complete in itself, having heart and lungs, bone and brain, of its own. We, on the contrary, are *members one of another, a body fitly joined together, and compacted by*

that which every joint supplieth. We need firm faith in God. We need also firm faith in each other. We can no more exist without it than a man can live without a heart. When I consider these things, I confess that the direct, absolute elective plan does not seem to me free from dangerous features, and that the arguments in its favor, as I weigh them, are not equal to those against it.

There will be difficulty, too, in arranging the details of the elective plan. The laity must have a voice, as well as the clergy. According to the present provisions of the Discipline, the electoral conference of laymen meets only once in four years. Shall the electoral conference meet annually, or shall all the presiding elders be elected at the same time, or shall lay delegation be introduced into the annual conferences?

Again: shall the voting be done by general ballot? If the whole conference is to vote in reference to each vacancy, the elder elect, going to his district, may make the unpleasant discovery that he is indebted for

his position almost wholly to outside support, the great majority of his own men, both lay and clerical, being opposed to him, and strongly in favor of some unsuccessful candidate. Shall the preachers and people of each district elect their own elder? How can it be ascertained, before the appointments are announced, who are the clerical voters of the district? Meanwhile, what is to be done with the candidates who are under consideration? Are they to be left afloat? Or are they to be set down for stations, the successful ones to be taken up again, and their places supplied, each change making half a score of other changes necessary! There are entanglements on every side at the very outset.

But the elective plan accords with American ideas, and we are slow to condemn, in the Church, a principle to which we intrust the highest interests of the State. The objection to the direct method of election is, that in case of a warm contest over rival candidates, in which, perhaps, some unkind things have been said, and unfair things

done, the voters of the unsuccessful party must receive appointments, in the making of which the presiding elder, whom they did their utmost to defeat, is to have a hand, and who, they fancy, may be tempted to remember who his friends were in the hour of need. The force of this objection may be somewhat lessened by adopting a modification of the plan of 1820. The prominent feature of that plan was that the bishop should name three candidates for each vacant district, and the conference choose one of the three, by ballot, without debate. Instead of this, let the conferences, by ballot, and without debate, nominate two candidates for each vacancy, and the bishop appoint one of them. The danger of irritation and alienation could be still further lessened, if need be, by requiring that the voter shall place on his ballot one name only for each vacancy, the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes being the nominees, provided the number received by either of them be not less than two fifths of the whole number of votes cast. Thus, in the most haz-

ardous conjunction of circumstances likely to occur, where a conference is divided into two parties of nearly equal strength, both of them would nominate the men of their choice, and the final decision be left to a third party, not involved in the local strife, and interested only for the good of all.

But it may be said that these elaborate devices to secure justice and fairness, and avoid wrong and the suspicion of wrong, are needless; that there is no danger of diplomacy and self-seeking; that piety and ability, however modest and unskilled in the art of making one's way in the world, will be appreciated, and that every good man is sure to be estimated at his true value. He doubtless will be—in his obituary. He will be as soon as he is entirely out of other people's way. He certainly will be in the Day of Judgment, and till then there is no absolute justice. Nevertheless, it is our duty, in framing Church law, not only to be just in intention, but to adopt all wise measures to secure justice in fact; not only to render it as difficult as possible for wrong

to be done, but also to remove, so far as we may, all ground of temptation and suspicion, and cause every preacher, and every member of the Church, to see and feel that all possible safeguards are thrown around the rights of the humblest child of God.

If I write with that candor, without which it is hardly worth while to write at all, I must here record the fact, that having begun the examination of this question with all my preferences in favor of the elective plan, I have found doubts multiplying all along the way.

The method proposed of nomination by the conference, the laity also taking part therein, might work well; but to make the office directly and absolutely elective would, it seems to me with my present light, be sure in the end to impair the aggressive vigor of our system.

If a true itinerancy is to be maintained, power, almost like that exercised in armies, must be lodged somewhere. This power the Church, for the good of the cause, has volun-

tarily placed in the hands of the bishops; and hitherto the plan has been vindicated by the marvelous successes achieved. The interests involved are of such magnitude as to demand the highest wisdom and the greatest caution in those who essay to deal with them, lest, while such a result is farthest from our thoughts, we inaugurate a process whereby the itinerancy, sooner or later, first in its spirit and then in its form, shall be destroyed. Moreover, not a few of the plans suggested professedly for the abolition of what is termed irresponsible power, do not abolish it, but merely transfer it to other hands; and the whole spirit and meaning of the advocated measure, expressed in plain terms, are simply this, "We cannot trust you, therefore you must trust us."

During the twenty years' discussion of the elective method many prominent men, Elijah Hedding, John Emory, George Peck, and others, were openly in favor of it, and yet the sentiments of all of them underwent a change. A few months before his death, in

1852, Bishop Hedding thus recorded his final views of the subject:—

“The time was, when, with many others, I fully believed that the election of presiding elders by the annual conferences, and making those presiding elders an efficient council with the bishops to fix the appointments of the preachers, would be an improvement on our system, and a benefit to the itinerant work; but observation and experience have taught me that I was under a mistake. . . . To submit the appointments of that office, so frequently as such appointments must be made, to an election in an annual conference, would be introducing and perpetuating a spirit of electioneering, and of party strifes, which would be injurious to the best interests of the cause of Christ. I have known instances where men were proposed for presiding elders, when I was urged by many members of the conference to appoint them; when I knew that majorities of the conferences would have elected them had they power to do it; when I knew the men better than the conferences knew them; when

I knew, as well as I could know a thing of that sort, if they were appointed presiding elders, they would employ the influence of that office, not for the benefit, but for the injury of the Church; for they were not the friends of the Church, but the leaders of parties. In those instances, my judgment and my conscience forbade my appointing them. I suffered reproach and persecution for so doing; but I am thankful to the Head of the Church that he afforded me an influence that led me to do as I did. I have known enough of the bad effects of electioneering, in selecting delegates for the General Conference, to impress deeply on my mind the conviction that that mode of appointing presiding elders would not be a benefit, but an injury to the Church."—*Life*, pages 218, 219.

Thus spoke the apostolic Hedding at a time when his active labors were over, and the ordinary responsibilities of the episcopal office no longer rested upon him. His objections are clothed in stronger language than I would feel at liberty to employ; nor

would my scantier personal knowledge of men and events justify me in urging his reasons in the form in which he puts them; yet I quote the passage as worthy at least of a hearing.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRESIDING ELDERSHIP—OTHER PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS.

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.—PROV. xi, 14.

THAT element of the plan of 1820 which makes the presiding elders the “Advisory Council of the bishop in stationing the preachers,” is worthy of consideration. It is true that the presiding elders of an Annual Conference are often termed the council now, and that the most important part of their duty is to aid in the work of stationing the preachers. The bishop calls them together the first day of the session of the conference, and proceeds to arrange the appointments. In most cases, he not only inquires carefully after facts, but invites a free expression of opinion. When the facts stated and the judgments given all point in

the same direction, the decision is easily reached. If conflicting statements are made, and opinions differ, he hears all sides of the question, and if he has any personal knowledge of men and circumstances, adds it to the common stock, and determines according to the best light which he possesses. After the most careful examination, and frank discussion of the case, errors may indeed be committed, but there is no concealment, no want of candor, no prejudice nor favoritism, and little ground for censure or suspicion. This is the way in which the work is usually done.

But the bishop may come to conference, perhaps to preside for the first time in his life, and it soon becomes evident that in regard to certain measures he has already formed his plans. When he reaches these points in his list, he either announces his decision at once, or lays the case before the elders in a way which is quiet and courteous enough, perhaps, but which invites silence rather than speech. All parties are aware that the bishop has no personal knowledge

of the things with which he is dealing, and the mystery is, whence he obtained the supposed information upon which he bases his action. It is certain that some one has been whispering in his ear; but who it was, and who sent him to whisper, and what the motive was, and for whose benefit this secret machinery was set in motion, is left to conjecture. All that is certainly known is that the bishop thinks that he needs no information beyond that which he has received by this secret inspiration. The presiding elders see that the question has been settled without them, and that an expression of their judgment would be disregarded as needless, perhaps resented as obtrusive, and they are silent. Thus the interests of pastors and Churches may be dealt with in a way which is sure to create irritation; and while the hidden operator of the noiseless enginery may be happy in his success, the confidence of others is shaken, and distrust and a sense of insecurity spread silently around like widening circles in water.

It may be said that very few cases of this

kind occur. This is true, and we rejoice that it is true. Still, that any such case should occur is a thing to be deprecated. It must be admitted, too, that when the appointing power has taken all possible care to deal intelligently and impartially with the interests placed in its hands, there is a possibility of a charge of injustice, where there is in reality no injustice, either intentional or accidental; that some good men are by nature unhappy, discontented with themselves, and suspicious of others; and that grace has not yet wrought a complete removal of these undesirable peculiarities of character. This is doubtless true. And it is also true that some men are confident and aspiring, full of self-assertion, with a high estimate of their own abilities, and claims to distinction; that they are naturally not over scrupulous in regard to the means whereby they secure their own interests; and that in these, too, the work of grace is not wholly complete.

It becomes us, therefore, to leave as few lurking places as possible for darkness, distrust, and suspicion. Fairness and justice

truth and honor, must permeate our entire system, and above all, the centers of that system, or it is doomed. Our honored bishops are simply ministers of Christ, placed in their responsible office by the suffrages of their brethren, not a few of whom they willingly recognize as their equals in every respect. They claim no superhuman wisdom or intelligence. They know only what they learn. In many cases, perhaps in most, they have little or no personal knowledge of the facts involved, and must of necessity depend upon information obtained from others. So far as the laws of the Church now show, the presiding elders have nothing to do with making the annual appointments; yet all concerned know that the practical wisdom of the assignments made depends quite as much upon the knowledge, sagacity, and fairness of those elders as of the bishop, who alone is by law responsible. Let fact, then, be substituted for fiction. The administration certainly would not stand on a less firm basis, if it were known that nothing is done in the dark, but that every measure proposed, and all

the circumstances connected with it, are discussed in open council, where every man has a legal right to tell what he knows, and inquire where he needs information, and each is responsible for the course which he takes.

But if the presiding elders are thus made, by ecclesiastical law, the Advisory Council of the bishops, what shall be their powers? Shall the bishop be required to put to vote in the council, the arrangements which he contemplates, and let the majority determine the question? This would transfer to other hands the most important duty of the bishop, and make the presiding elders, in form and in fact, the appointing power of the Church. Little would remain of the episcopate, except the duty of presiding in the annual conferences, and the meetings of the presiding elders, deciding questions of Church law, and performing the rite of ordination. And the same objections, which oppose the idea of making presiding elders of the bishops, lie with at least equal force against any project which would virtually make bishops of the presiding elders. At

whichever point the process is begun, the result is the same, and two lines of official duty which ought to be kept separate and distinct are merged into one.

Shall the bishop be required to lay his plans before his council, and ask their opinion, and yet be under no obligations beyond this? Even this would be an important advance on the present methods. The discipline directs the presiding elder to "attend the bishops when present in his district," and the language in which the duty is set forth seems to convey the idea that the presiding elder shall wait upon the bishop, and be ready to answer such questions as may be put to him, and perhaps offer an opinion when required to do so, but nothing more. Except what may be gathered from the line quoted, the law of the Church gives no hint of any aid rendered by the elder in the work of stationing the preachers. And, as we have said, cases sometimes do occur in which the bishop hardly goes through the form of asking the judgment of the presiding elders. It would be an important advance, then, to

require the bishop in all cases to counsel with the presiding elders, and learn from them what they deem the facts connected with the action proposed, and what they judge to be the best method of dealing with a difficult question.

But some who are discussing this matter would not stop here, but would so change the law as to require the bishop to put to vote in the council measures to which objections are made, and let the majority determine. As it has already been remarked, this mode of settling doubtful questions would really transfer the appointing power bodily to the presiding elders. The very utmost that could be done, with any degree of safety, would be to give the unanimous judgment of the presiding elders a veto power in respect to any proposed action; but even in regard to this, the argument is hardly as conclusive as it should be to justify so important a change. It is true that *in the multitude of counselors there is safety*; that, as a rule, the judgment of three or five men is worth more than that of one man.

Still, the possession of the veto power would now and then be very embarrassing to the elders, and prove a firebrand of discord. I can imagine a discontented preacher, or a persistent committee from some dissatisfied or anxious Church, having labored in vain with the bishop, going from one presiding elder to another, and seeking to get them to pledge themselves in the case. I can imagine that they may foresee difficulty with the bishop, and quietly set about this work beforehand, so that when the bishop reaches the conference he may find the most important questions of the session settled without his being even consulted. I can imagine, also, one presiding elder holding out against all his colleagues, not only nullifying their united judgment, and frustrating their purposes, but disappointing the hopes of a multitude of other brethren, clerical and lay, and preparing the way for a sharp contest at the next election, which shall *separate chief friends*. In fine, I believe that the presiding elders ought to be, in law, "the Advisory Council of the bishop in stationing the

preachers," and thus the bishop be bound to examine, in open council, the matters upon which he is about to act, and the action which he contemplates; but when we venture beyond this, and attempt to assign the presiding elders a definite degree of responsibility in determining the questions at issue, so many doubts intervene that I hesitate and wait for the light.

But while these modifications of the Discipline would require the action of the General Conference, there are changes of administration which can be effected at any time. Not a few of these have been proposed. It has been suggested that the districts should be made smaller, and on each of them one of the pastors be made chairman, and that his duty should be, in addition to the regular services in his own Church, to superintend the district, holding conferences with the official boards of the various charges as circumstances require, acquaint himself with the pastors, and the condition of affairs generally, and represent the district before the Annual Conference and in the council. It

is proposed, also, in view of his time being divided between his own Church and the district, his salary be paid in part by the Church of which he is pastor, and in part by the other Churches of the district; and that to secure time for his duties as Chairman, he be stationed at one of the less important points in his field, where his labors will not be burdensome. This arrangement is proposed under the impression that all needed oversight could be thus secured, and at the same time a large saving of men and money be made.

To this plan there are serious objections. The chairmen must be among the ablest men of the conference, otherwise the new office will not command due respect. But able men are in demand for the important stations, where the regular duties of the pastoral office are sufficient to occupy all their time, and tax all their strength. Our pastors, even in the smaller Churches, find abundance of work to be done. The first business of the chairman must be in his own Church, and what he does outside be

incidental, only such as his leisure permits, else his people will complain. If the charge is so small as to permit him to spend a considerable part of his time on the district, a considerable part of his support must come from the district, and thus the economical argument, which is the principal one urged in favor of the arrangement, is destroyed.

Moreover, if a true itinerancy is maintained, the chairmen of the various districts are to "attend the bishops," and by the information which they furnish, and the suggestions which they offer, aid in making the appointments, including, of course, their own. Here, then, is a chance for human nature to assert itself in the chairmen, and prompt them to take good care of themselves; and for human nature in the other pastors to assert itself in suspicions and complaints, that the chairmen do take very good care of themselves. But the hour we lose faith in each other, and especially in the justice and honor of the appointing power, the Church becomes a rope of sand. When the pastors see that there is a dis-

turbing element in the very center of our enginery, whereby a certain set of men obtain an unfair advantage over their brethren, the voice of discontent will be heard, and the work of disintegration begin. They will lose spirit and courage; they will have no heart for their labors, no joyous love for the Church, no feeling of enthusiastic loyalty toward it, unless they can count on being fairly and honorably dealt with in it. Our itinerant system, at the best, brings us into a perpetual competition which is sufficiently trying. Certainly it is not wise needlessly to increase the strain.

And where is the economy in regard either to men or money? To take one third of the time of each of three men, is exactly equal to taking the whole time of one. To assess upon the Churches of a small district one third of the salary of a chairman is exactly equivalent to assessing upon the same Churches one third of the salary of a presiding elder whose district is three times as large. Moreover, the duties which are incidental, secondary to something else, are

not likely to be as well performed as they would be where the responsibility is not divided, and they are made the sole business of the one performing them.

There is, however, a modification of the office which has been progressing silently for years, and which it is needful to examine, that we may ascertain its character and probable limits. The episcopacy itself, having undergone the same process, furnishes an accurate illustration. When the conference of 1784, organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church, made it the duty of a general superintendent to "travel at large among the people," incessant preaching was intended as well as incessant travel, and our first bishops so understood it. Asbury, down to the very close of his long and busy life, was as laborious as the most faithful and zealous of the itinerants whose toils he directed. In downright hard work, in the length of his journeys, through forest and plain, over mountains where there were no roads, and rivers where there were no bridges, in the rigors of the climate which he encountered,

and in the burdens of disease and pain which he bore year after year, he exceeded Wesley himself. Always in motion, searching for precious souls, he preached almost every day, and often twice or thrice a day. When so worn and wasted by disease that he was too weak to stand up before the people, he sat in his chair and preached, keeping up, as he remarks in his journal, "a kind of running fire with his small gun sermonizing." Too far gone to walk, he was carried into the church, in Richmond, Va., on Sunday, the 24th of March, 1816, and placed in a chair, to deliver his last discourse; and when he was dying, the next Sabbath after this sermon, almost his last utterance was an inquiry whether it was not "time for meeting." Thus the Methodist episcopacy began its labors, annually visiting every circuit, and preaching in every church. The growth of the work soon rendered this impossible; and the supervision of the Church and its accumulating interests and enterprises made increasing demands upon the time and energies of the bishops, till their

pulpit labors have become incidental and occasional only. And this is right.

The presiding eldership is now undergoing the same transition. In the year 1814, when the whole number of communicants in the Church was 211,000, there were 398 circuits and stations, and 49 presiding elders' districts. These districts comprised, on the average, 8 circuits and stations, and 12 preachers each. These figures show, more conclusively than any mere statement to that effect could make it, that the chief work of a presiding elder was then that of an evangelist. The Mississippi Conference, for example, contained in 1820 only eleven charges and fourteen preachers, and yet was divided into three districts, in one of which there were only two circuits and three preachers. To make it the sole business of one man to oversee the labors of three or four others would seem to be a criminal waste of the Church's resources.

It is evident that the presiding elder's duties were not merely, or even mainly, supervisory, but that he was expected to be

at work all the time, helping his preachers at any point where there were special indications of success, conducting camp-meetings, and exploring new fields. The preachers were many of them young, poorly prepared for the position which they occupied, and not a few of them failures in it.

In 1814 of the 622 men appointed to the circuits and stations, only 281 had received ordination as elders. Of the 49 districts into which the Church was then divided, two had not a single ordained elder among the pastors, and four more had only one each. Of the whole number of preachers received on trial in the conferences during the first half century of our history, one half located after a few years of service. These incessant departures from the itinerant ranks created a necessity for the reception of increased numbers of new and untried men. Consequently the maturity, the experience, the executive ability and the pulpit power of the ministry were largely gathered into the eldership, where they could do the most effective service. The presiding elder was

expected to represent the Church before the public, explain its doctrines and polity, and defend them against the assaults made upon them, and thus strengthen the hands and smooth the way of the young itinerants on the several circuits of his district.

In every part of our work, except, perhaps, among the colored people of the South, this state of things has passed or is rapidly passing away. The age of bitter and bigoted controversy is gone. We are no longer compelled as a Church to explain our right to exist. Our ministry, as a body, are intelligent, able, well prepared for the duties to which they are called. The presiding elders, in the aggregate, are little more than fair representatives of the culture, acceptability, and efficiency of the ministry in general. The value of the office as an evangelizing agency, therefore, is no longer what it was. Its utility as an element of the superintendency must vindicate the presiding eldership, or the office cease to be.

But while it is evident that the pulpit labors of the elder are less needful than they

once were, it is equally evident that in other directions the responsibilities of the office increase. In 1814 the elder held, on an average, two Quarterly Conferences in three weeks. Now, in the Northern and Middle States, he holds from two to four in one week. The old style quarterly meeting occupied two days. The presiding elder preached Saturday morning, and held the Quarterly Conference in the afternoon. In the evening there was another sermon, sometimes preached by the elder, sometimes by one of the circuit preachers. Sunday was the great day of the occasion. The services began with a love-feast an hour and a half or two hours long, at which the elder presided; then came a sermon, perhaps as long, by the elder. Then followed the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, also by the elder, assisted by the ordained preachers present; and thus ended the regular services of the day. Every thing was done deliberately and without haste, the elder having no other engagement to hurry him away, and the people, many of whom

had traveled miles to attend, anxious to make the most of the privileges which they so highly prized, and loth to separate, even when the inevitable hour had come.

But this old time quarterly meeting is fast becoming a thing of the past. Already there are whole conferences in which it is utterly unknown, save as a golden memory of some venerable father or mother of our Israel. The circuits have been divided, and subdivided, till almost every little church stands alone, and the presiding elder, instead of devoting two days to one quarterly meeting, and still leaving every third Sunday vacant, often holds three or four quarterly meetings in a week; he has no vacant Sabbath in the year, and even then is compelled to send substitutes to do a part of his work.

Nor is it practicable to divide and subdivide the districts, so as to keep pace with the rapid numerical increase of the charges. The disintegration of the circuit system, not on'y in the older conferences, and the more densely populated portions of our Church

territory, but every-where, has created a multitude of stations hardly strong enough to give their pastors a moderate support, and ill prepared to pay additional assessments for the presiding elder.

Our Church statistics reveal the curious fact that as we have grown in numbers and strength, and local Churches have multiplied, and the facilities for travel have increased, districts, presiding elders, and preachers have increased still more rapidly; so that, on the average, each district and each pastoral charge contains a smaller number of communicants than they contained forty and sixty years ago, and consequently the Church is now more heavily officered than it has been in the past. We take the figures at four different historic points, the intervals between being twenty years each.

	1814.	1834.	1854.	1874.
Number of Districts.....	49	127	223	441
Average No. Circuits and Station on a District.....	8	10	16	19
Average No. Preachers on District.	12	18	21	20
Average No. Com's on District.....	4,373	5,030	3,540	3,550
Average No. of Communicants to each Preacher.....	340	278	170	180

No further proof is needed to show that it is unwise, if not impossible, to multiply the districts as the charges increase in number, and that, in the greater part of our territory, the Quarterly Meetings of early Methodism, as well as the necessities which created them, are forever gone. The functions of the presiding eldership must, therefore, be adjusted to the new order of things. In 1784, when the office was created, no supervisory duties were assigned the elder, the Discipline merely directing him to "administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to perform all the other rites prescribed by our liturgy." In 1786 the Discipline invested the elder with a sort of vice-episcopal authority, directing him to "exercise within his own district, during the absence of the superintendents, all the powers invested in them for the government of the Church." Quarterly meetings were at first held by the preachers in charge of circuits; but in 1792 the elder was directed to hold them, and to "call together, at each quarterly meeting, all the traveling and local preach-

ers, exhorters, stewards, and leaders of the circuit, to hear complaints and to receive appeals."

This is the first legal definition of the powers of the Quarterly Conference. Subsequent legislation has enlarged these powers from time to time, until they include a wide area of usefulness and responsibility. The Quarterly Conference now hears the annual report of the trustees, and admits or refuses to admit them to a seat in the body; it conducts the trials of local preachers, and hears appeals from private members; it supervises the Sunday-school, deciding what books shall be used therein, and removing the superintendent at pleasure; it fixes the salary of the pastor, and without its consent no local preacher can be licensed, or ordained, or received into the traveling connection. The pastor is responsible for the pulpit, and he appoints the leaders and nominates the stewards, but all the temporal concerns of the society, and most of its agencies for Church work, are placed in the care and under the supervision of the Quarterly Con-

ference, which has thus become the controlling element of the local Church; and upon the wisdom of its action, and the piety, fidelity, and zeal of its members, the religious as well as the temporal prosperity of the Church greatly depends.

To hold the sessions of this body, to review all local interests, both temporal and spiritual, to decide the questions of law which are involved in the proceedings, to give counsel, pointing out, so far as he may, the best mode of correcting what is amiss, or of supplying what is lacking, employing the weight of his official position and his personal character to secure harmony of spirit and unity of action, and so to acquaint himself with all the affairs of the Church as to enable him to make a correct representation at the next Annual Conference, are at the present time the chief duties of the presiding elder.

The administration ought to be adjusted to these facts. Ability in the pulpit, decorum and impressiveness in administering the sacraments, are valuable adjuncts of the

other qualifications demanded; but the value of the office is in the thoroughness of the supervision, and the wisdom of the management which it brings to the aid of pastor and people. The Quarterly and the Annual Conferences are the great field for the accomplishment of the work. The traditions of 1784 on this point must be abandoned, and the size of the districts must be adjusted, not to the old necessities which have ceased, but those which remain and grow; not to the number of Churches in which the elder can preach and administer the sacraments four times a year, but to the number of which he is able to take thorough oversight, preaching as often as he can, where there is the most urgent call for his services.

The number of charges which a district should contain depends, of course, upon the distances to be traversed, the facilities for travel, the grade of the pastors, and the state of the Churches. Where the Churches are far apart, and an unusual proportion of the pastors without authority to administer the

sacraments, the work approaches the conditions of 1784, and the boundaries of the district must be traced accordingly. But in the more densely peopled parts of our territory it is probable that, as a rule, the presiding elder, without unduly taxing his time or physical endurance, can exercise efficient supervision over twice as many Churches as he can visit on the Sabbath to preach even a single sermon.

In our large cities, where the elder sees perhaps a majority of his pastors every week at the Preachers' Meeting, and more or fewer of the leading men of the various Churches in the street every day, the real duties of the office may be efficiently performed without making more than two or three formal visits during the year, the pastor holding the other Quarterly Conferences, as the Discipline provides in case of the elder's absence. If the districts can thus be enlarged without impairing the efficiency of the organization, duty to God and his Church requires that it be done. Men of the character needed are not so abundant that we

can afford to set three to do a work which may be as well done by two. Our laity are indeed loyal to the Church, and generous in their provisions for the ministry; but we have no right to call upon them to squander their money in supporting three men where two only are needed.

In 1874, as we have seen, there were 441 presiding elders assigned to districts. The aggregate of their salaries must have been something in the neighborhood of \$600,000. The episcopacy cost \$57,000 more. This is a large force of men to employ in the work of supervision. This is a large sum of money to be expended annually for this work. The tendency of all compact organizations, whose resources are abundant, is to become overloaded with officials and salaries. Let us see to it that we do not share the fatal infection. Certainly a little honest investigation and serious consideration will do no harm. To restore the numerical proportions of 1834, and so arrange the districts that each will include, on the average, as many Church members as the districts then

averaged, would give us 310 presiding elders instead of 441, the present number, and save, perhaps, \$200,000 annually. It would seem that the increased facilities for travel ought to enable us at least to maintain the ratio of forty years ago.



CHAPTER IX.

THE PERILS OF ECCLESIASTICAL PROSPERITY.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
2 TIM. iii, 1.

THE dangers of whose approach Paul warns his *son in the Gospel* were not those of the sword, nor the flame. The times of persecution were indeed drawing near, and the instruments of torture and death were already prepared for those *of whom the world was not worthy*. The days of burning and slaughter came. Ten times pagan Rome stretched forth her iron hand to crush the infant Church; the blood of saints flowed like water, and yet, through three centuries of fiery trial, the truth triumphed, and the Church grew. Of every heathen crowd that witnessed the holy joy with which the martyr welcomed pain and death for his Master's sake, not a few turned

from the scene convinced that Christianity is of God, and repenting, believing in Jesus of Nazareth, were ready, in their turn, to lay down their lives for the truth.

Paul's warning refers to the perils within the Church, the weakness, the self-seeking, the pride, the ambition, the love of the world, among those who denied *the power of godliness*, while they were very careful to maintain the form thereof. In short, he warns the Church against itself. History shows that Paul sounded no false alarm. Three centuries of fierce persecution passed over the Church, and left it pure, true, and stronger than ever. Then came the professed conversion of the Roman emperor; then Christianity became the court fashion; the Church rose to the highest pitch of worldly honor, and every crafty schemer who coveted the royal favor must needs pretend to embrace the royal religion. Christianity at once became popular. Magnificent Churches were erected, worship was made a splendid show, gold began to pour into the ecclesiastical coffers; and with the gold came the worldly,

the indolent, and the mercenary, seeking places of honor and profit. The ministry attained prominence and public consideration. The Church was organized more and more after the model of the State; bishops, archbishops, and patriarchs arose, with palaces and revenues and power, with robes and miters and crosiers; and at last a pope ascended his ecclesiastical throne and claimed the homage of a prostrate world.

To consolidate all this usurped power and grandeur required audacity and craft on the part of the ministry; nor were audacity and craft wanting. Falsehood after falsehood was invented, and put forth in the name of God, with curses added, consigning to eternal perdition all who failed to believe, or hesitated to obey; the entire machinery of the Church was directed to the enslavement of the minds and souls of men, till Popery stood in its might, a stupendous imposture, founded on stupendous crime. The errors of Romanism, numerous and multiform as they are, have a common origin and wear a common likeness. Their aim and effect are

to increase the power of the Church over the reason, the conscience, the purse, and the person of the dupe, to nail the ears of men to the doorpost of the priest and consign them to absolute and perpetual bondage.

A passing glance at these *commandments of men* will verify the statements made. The Bible, Rome tells us, is the word of God, but the priest must explain it, or it may work death instead of life to him that reads. The bread and the wine of the eucharist become the true flesh and blood of Christ, and means of wondrous grace; but the priest alone can work the marvelous transformation. Confession is essential to salvation, but the priest must hear it. Absolution is essential, but priestly lips must pronounce it. Matrimony is a sacrament, but there is no lawful marriage unless the priest blesses it. Extreme unction smooths the passage of the dying, but priestly hands alone can administer it. Holy ground conduces to the repose of the dead, but the priest alone can consecrate it. Masses have power to deliver souls from purgatory, but the priest must say them.

The last dogma thus far added to the ever-growing list of things to be believed on pain of eternal damnation is that the Pope is infallible, and all the world must bow down before him and obey his mandates. Every distinctive feature of the papal scheme gives evidence that it is a gigantic plot for the exaltation of the ministry and the enslavement of the people.

Romish assumption, indeed, has not yet completed its work. Inasmuch as the pope always delivers his infallible teachings in Latin, which tongue the people in general do not understand, Papal logic requires the promulgation of another dogma, with curses duly annexed, declaring that as the pope, explaining the word of God to the world, is infallible, so the priest, explaining to his people the words of the pope, is also infallible. And then still another dogma, garnished with anathemas, is needed to assure the faithful, that if they listen with due submission to the words of the priest they will infallibly understand him.

No ; Paul's warning was not a false alarm.

The toils and sufferings, the zeal, courage, and success of the early Christians, and the decadence which seemed to result from the very triumphs achieved, are but the types of the process which we find repeated over and over again all along the lines of history. Faithful men of God, impelled by an overwhelming sense of duty, go forth *weeping, bearing precious seed*, and their labors are divinely blessed. A great harvest fills the land with gladness, and heaven with rejoicing. Then prosperity becomes a snare; the ministry, exalted to a high social position, honored, influential, liberally supported, lose the fervor, the zeal, the burning love of souls, the self-abnegation which marked them at the beginning, and sit down to enjoy, in dignified ease, the fruits of earlier toil and sacrifice; the people sink into spiritual repose, if not apathy, and the Church's career of victory is ended. When numbers, wealth, and popularity come, purity, zeal, and aggressive power are apt to decline.

It is not too soon for the Methodist Episcopal Church to look about her and inquire

whether her *perilous times* are approaching. In 1784 the Methodist societies numbered 15,000 members. In 1874, ninety years afterward, they numbered 1,563,521, or one hundred times as many. The population of the country is now about ten times what it was in 1784. Consequently, while the nation has increased ten fold, our Church has increased a hundred fold. The Church is, therefore, ten times as strong, in comparison with the entire people, as it was in 1784. If we include the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the African Methodist Churches, and the various other bodies which bear the name, and hold the peculiar doctrinal system of Methodism, the result is still more surprising. The figures given do not refer to a happy period of exceptional success, but embrace the entire history of the Church from the day of its organization to the present time, a period whose national records are diversified with war and peace, prosperity and adversity, and all the vicissitudes which befall a new and rising people.

If some enthusiastic hearer of Captain Webb, or Robert Strawbridge, a hundred years ago, had ventured to foretell the present magnitude of the Church, he would have been accounted a wild enthusiast. What, then, shall we account a safe estimate of another century? Shall we name five millions or ten? Certainly, if no great calamity befalls the nation, and its growth and progress continue in any thing like the present ratio; and if the Methodist Episcopal Church retains its ancient spirit and its unity, and, above all, the smile of the ever-blessed God, the estimate of ten millions of members, a hundred years hence, is far less extravagant than a prophecy of our present numbers would have seemed a hundred years ago.

Our Church property has increased still more rapidly than the number of communicants. In 1865 it was valued at thirty-one millions of dollars; in 1874 it had become seventy-eight millions. Something of this increased value is indeed due to the advance in the prices of real estate in general; never-

theless, the fact of a rapid accumulation remains. The wealth of our people has probably increased far more rapidly than the number of communicants. Whether it be matter of congratulation or of humiliation, the Methodist Episcopal Church has grown to be a great and powerful body, commanding more and more of that kind of respect which the world pays to numbers, wealth, and social influence.

We are known, too, to be united in a warm fellowship which affects men in all the relations of life, and touches their interests at every point. The peculiar warmth of this fellowship may have decreased somewhat, as the force of persecution from without has ceased to compel us to unite for self-defense. The diminished attendance at class-meetings has also tended to lessen it, by lessening friendly intercourse among our people. Still, it has hitherto been so marked a characteristic of our Church life, that it will probably remain for years to come a distinguishing trait of our character as a Church. The future of the Methodist Epis-

copal Church, therefore, seems to foreshadow augmented numbers, increased ecclesiastical and personal wealth, a thoroughly organized, closely compacted body, which shall carry into the coming years something, at least, of the same energy, courage, and enthusiasm which have made its past history bright with achievement.

But let us not deceive ourselves. There is ground for fear as well as hope, and for more of hope the more we fear. New possibilities of sudden disaster or slow decay lie in our path. Prosperity itself may undermine our strength. Men are sometimes crushed by the caving in of gold mines, and perish by the weight of their own riches. When a Church whose career began in obscurity, poverty, and weakness, and whose every step upward was made in the face of persecution and difficulty, has won its way to a place among the foremost Christian bodies of the land, it does not find it easy, in the day of its triumph, to retain the self-denial, the simplicity, the purity of doctrine and of life, the joyous loyalty to God and the right,

which were the goodly weapons with which the victory was gained.

The attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church before the world is now very different from what it was a century ago ; nor is it unreasonable for us to fear that in its new position the Church itself may undergo a change, both as an exponent of the religion of Christ, and as an instrument for the evangelization of the world. A difficult practical problem is to be solved. How shall the stream widen without losing its depth? How shall we use the new tools wisely, and not forget how to handle the old ones with which so much good work has been done? How shall a Church, beginning with nothing but God and the truth, gather in a mighty host, and become strong in wealth, intelligence, and public favor, and at the same time remain sound in faith, pure in life, spiritual, humble, self-denying, having *no confidence in the flesh*? Only the most faithful adherence to the vital doctrines of God's word, and the most firm and fearless resistance to all attempts, open or silent, to

lower the standard of moral conduct, or weaken the Discipline of the Church, either in the letter or the administration, can save us from declension and decay. Now is the time for us to lay aside all self-deception and self-flattery, and exercise the keenest vigilance. A false alarm, though not pleasant, will be less likely to do injury than false confidence. We are in no danger, at the present time, of erring in the direction of undue self-distrust. Let us then be honest with ourselves, and consider in what ways the great prosperity of our communion will naturally tend to affect unfavorably our Church life.

I. People, whether more or less convinced of their need of personal religion, will be more ready to enter our fold.

There was a time when Methodists, like their Master in the day of his humiliation, were *despised and rejected of men*. The older Churches pronounced our doctrines heresy, our organization without authority, our ministers ignorant, and our experience false. The world declared our usages un-

reasonable and burdensome, and our morals fanatically severe. The older Churches and the world united their voices in a noisy chorus of condemnation, branding Methodism as a thing to be despised and abhorred. Then it was indeed something of "a cross" to identify one's self with the Methodists. It dug a gulf, wide and deep, between the child of God and the children of this world, severing friendships, breaking up old associations, and compelling a reconstruction of social life. It severed, at once and forever, the ties which bind one to another the victims of vice, and the votaries of frivolous pleasure. It sometimes even drove sons and daughters from the parental roof, and cut them off from their inheritance.

This state of things would naturally exert a powerful influence upon the rising society. In those times of obloquy and persecution, the converts who cast in their lot with the Methodist Episcopal Church were thoroughly convinced and thoroughly in earnest, ready to do and suffer all things, that they might throw off the burden of sin, and find

pardon and peace. They felt like Bunyan's Pilgrim, when he put his fingers in his ears and fled from the City of Destruction, crying "Life! life! eternal life!" This pungent conviction, this thorough earnestness, prompted a complete self-surrender, and gave intensity to the entire experience, and solid strength to the whole religious life. There was no motive for insincere profession, no place for compromise, no border land, where a man of feeble purpose could pitch his tent and live in peace and friendship with his neighbors both on the right and the left. Thus the dishonor which rested upon the Methodist Episcopal Church was like the cold bath which the ancient Spartans administered to their new born infants: it secured general vigor among the people because none but the vigorous had strength to survive it.

But things have changed. The *offense of the cross* has not ceased, but it is not what it was. It would be hard to find in all our land a village inhabited by American people where membership in the Methodist Epis-

copal Church would be counted a discredit, or create adverse prejudice. Consequently it requires less of self-abnegation, less of self-surrender, to bear the name of Methodist. To enter the fold, therefore, does not of necessity require the pungent conviction, the force of conscience, which it once demanded. No doubt many now are as clearly convinced, and as thoroughly in earnest, as were the more reluctant converts of other times ; yet the circumstances to which reference is made must have an influence. The conclusion seems inevitable that as the Church becomes rich, powerful, and what the world calls respectable, men will be willing, or even eager, to enter it whose feeble religious life would never have survived the Spartan bath of ridicule, contempt, and social separation of other days.

It is not argued that the success of the Church must necessarily prove fatal to it. Still, we hold that success involves dangers which did not exist in the day of weakness and unpopularity. It is not assumed that the Church must of necessity decline in

purity and spiritual power as numbers and wealth increase; but we do hold that it is wise to recognize the new peril, and do what we can to avert evil. Unless thus recognized and resisted, evil will surely come, and each degree of decadence only prepare the way for another.

There will be action and reaction. The larger the proportion of half-hearted, easy-going members already in the Church, the lower will be the conditions of entrance, and the less the religious obligations understood to be assumed in uniting with it. Falling bodies descend with a velocity which every moment increases, because the force which draws them downward gives them every moment a new impulse. History does not lack examples of Churches which began scriptural in doctrine and discipline, and pure in life, and for a time, like the heavenly city in the seer's vision, shone with the glory of God; but, not guarding against the insidious influence of prosperity, they ceased to be holy and true, and began to decline, finally falling so low that they

became a hissing and a byword among skeptics and scoffers.

It is lawful for us to hope that our Church throughout all ages will escape this shame, and that the shadow of it may never darken our path; nevertheless, it is folly for us not to see the coming danger; it is presumption for us to expect an easy escape. Our numbers are rapidly increasing; but let us not be infected with the mania for numbers. There never was a time, and now least of all, when we were able to plead that to grow was so essential that we could not afford to scan too closely either the experience or the life of those who were ready to unite with us. Now is the time when special care is needed in guarding the doors of the Church, and inculcating the precepts of the Gospel upon those already within, so that while the timid, the self-distrustful, and the tempted may receive a cordial welcome, men of tainted reputation and unworthy lives may have no place among us. If for the sake of numbers, and the financial strength which numbers bring, we sacrifice the purity, the spiritual

beauty and moral power, of the Church, we sell the Master over again for pieces of silver.

2. The growing prosperity of the Church will tend to affect the character of the future ministry.

During many years of our history, the call to the ministry among us was a fearful thing to hear. To enter the itinerancy required the sacrifice of much which in itself is not only morally right, but valuable, and naturally to be desired. It involved a surrender of other plans of life, in themselves right and worthy, a yielding up of cherished purposes, a fading out of bright hopes ; in short, a mental and moral process akin to that which comes to other men on their death-beds. He who obeyed the call divine, left his natal place to become a life-long wanderer. While other young men whom he knew were winning their way to competence, he must be content to expect, at the best, a bare support, so long as he was able to toil in his arduous work, while fancy painted, in the dim distance, an old age of

penury and neglect. The thought of marriage and home came to him as well as to others, but came clouded with doubt, the fear that a family would prove an impediment in his ministry, the certainty that it would be a poor home, scanty in its comforts, and very lonely to those who should wait there, while he was absent on his long journeys around his circuit.

Nor did the praise of men supply the place of more tangible reward. The world frowned and jeered, pronouncing him sometimes a fanatic, sometimes a hypocrite, sometimes a fool. The clergy of other denominations too often treated him with pretended pity and real contempt, vinegar mingled with gall, as one who ran when God had not sent, and who babbled of things of which he knew nothing. This they did, partly because they believed the charges which they uttered ; partly because this kind of speech was the little stratagem which they deemed it politic to use in order to keep their flocks from straying away, and their own personal interests from being damaged. But whether

the warning was mercenary or mistaken in its origin, many believed it, and thought that to insult a Methodist preacher was *to do God service*.

No wonder that when the first whisper of the dreaded duty came, many a young man wept and prayed that the burden might not be laid upon him, and yielded only when he felt that *woe was unto him if he preached not the Gospel of Christ*. The weight of the ministerial burden in those early days is attested, not only by the recorded experiences of the preachers, the months of mental agony which they endured before they consented, but by the sad and significant fact that during the first fifty years of our history, one half of those who entered upon the work located, after having traveled an average period of about seven years.

The woe which Paul dreaded still remains. There are still calls to the ministry, voices that fall upon the inner ear, which are as truly from God as any that ever sent prophet or apostle on his holy errand; but they are not now feared as they were. Many of

the repellant features of the ministerial office of earlier days having ceased to exist, it would be irrational to expect the question of duty to stir so fierce a conflict in the minds of our young men ; yet the Lord of the harvest demands the same deep searchings of heart, the same anxious weighing of the infinite interests involved, the same intense solicitude to settle the question on the right principle, honestly, wisely, in the fear of God and the light of eternity.

And there may still be cases where those who are truly called are reluctant to obey, and yield only when they dare no longer resist. These cases, however, must form a smaller proportion now than in the early times of the Church. To the minds of pious, intelligent young men, the work of the ministry must be attractive rather than repellant ; and some will be tempted to enter the field under the influence of motives which fall below the true standard. Thus the woe still remains ; but the mutations of the times have changed its location to another point of moral danger. It was once

for those who were slow to obey the call divine ; it is now for those who do not wait to be divinely called. It was once the thunder of the storm which burst upon the sea around some Jonah, who refused to deliver the heavenly message which God had put into his lips ; it is now the voice of the angel that bars the way of the mercenary sons of Bosor, who are ready to prophesy for friend or foe, provided their *wages of unrighteousness* are duly paid.

That a change has taken place is not to be lamented. We may be rationally glad that the work of the ministry no longer demands the utter self-sacrifice of other days. It would be unnatural as well as unjust, for a rich and influential Christian body to abandon its faithful ministers to the poverty and privation which were inseparable from the work in the beginning. The Church evinces no disposition to withhold from them a fair share of the fruits of prosperity. Where the worldly resources of the membership are abundant, it is a duty and a privilege to furnish their pastors with a compe-

tent, or even a generous support; and an intelligent and pious people will so esteem it. As the Church grows strong, it will secure more respect and deference in the general community, and of this also a goodly portion will fall to the lot of the pastor.

Thus worldly considerations no longer repel men from the sacred calling. A comfortable support is about as sure in the ministry as in other vocations. Public respect and consideration are surer. No amount of wealth, no degree of political exaltation, can in itself place a man above the humblest faithful minister of Christ, or secure as full a measure of public confidence. The social position thus is attractive. The duties pertaining to the office are congenial to an active mind, fond of knowledge, and of imparting knowledge to other minds. Thus the office of a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in our own times, is not without its attractions for the worldly side of human nature.

The temporal condition of the Church will doubtless continue to improve. For

some time, indeed, there will be a frontier line of pioneer work, which will require something akin to the toils of the early itinerants; but this is the exception. The Church is becoming strong. Beautiful and spacious houses of worship, and commodious parsonages, are multiplying. Every year there is a larger number of societies able and willing to furnish their pastors a generous support. Moreover, that feature of our system which guarantees the minister a field of labor as long as he is able to perform the duties which pertain to it, adds to the worldly value of the office. In political life, men plot and struggle long and hard for positions which pay no better, and have the serious objection of being exceedingly precarious.

It is safe to assume, then, that in the future history of our Church the ministerial office will be found to possess attractions not only for those who are *called of God, as was Aaron*, but even for the ambitious and self-seeking; and that it will tend to draw into it some whose convictions of duty are not very strong, and whose motives for en-

tering the ministry are only in part right and worthy, such as will endure the final test. How shall the door be guarded, so that none may find entrance except those who are divinely commissioned for the work? He that *searcheth the heart* may know; but how can man know?

But the peril does not lurk about the door only. Those who enter the ministry with an eye single to the glory of God, and with a burning love for souls, may fall by insensible degrees from the higher to a lower class of motives. And, in fact, it is almost impossible to draw the line which separates good from evil, that which is allowable from that which brings condemnation. The wants of the minister and his family are only such as others feel and strive to supply, without a suspicion of wrong. That he should have as comfortable a home as the average of his people, that he should live as well, that he should be able to educate his children, that he should lay up a little for the exigencies of the unknown years to come, does not seem unreasonable, nor does the desire ap-

pear criminal. It seems to be the universal judgment of men, that every man, except the preacher, ought as a matter of duty to aim at these very things. Why, then, accuse the pastor of being worldly and mercenary, if he feels as others feel, and desires to do what they recognize as their duty, and are universally applauded for doing well?

Moreover, God made it the duty of his ancient people to provide well for those who ministered in holy things. Their food and raiment were the best in use among the people, and God resented any neglect of the duty enjoined upon the people to provide for the sons of Aaron. The command to *bring all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat* in the house of the Lord, and that an abundant blessing may follow, is a literal command; and it shows that to neglect the wants of those set apart for holy service was, at least in those times, to *rob God*, and dry up the fountains of divine benediction. Have things so changed that it is sinful, in these latter days, for the minister to prefer the abundant support

which, thirty centuries ago, was divinely commanded?

It is true, that when the new dispensation began, no similar formal arrangement was made for the support of the Gospel ministry. Still, the New Testament, as plainly as the Old, teaches the same principle, declaring that, as in other times they that *waited at the altar* were *partakers of the altar*, so now *hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel*. The call to preach is no more divine than the call to support the preacher.

And yet, while these things cannot be gainsayed, it must be added that the ministry may press what seems their just claim with a persistence that cripples them in their work, and utterly destroys the aggressive power of the Church. Fidelity to the truth requires that it be said, in plainest terms, that the work of God cannot prosper as it ought, unless a portion of the ministry, or the ministers, during at least a part of their term of service, are content to toil hard without the abundant support which, in the

abstract, seems their due. That the good news may be preached *to every creature*, as the original commission requires, the expense of doing it must be kept at the lowest reasonable and practicable limit. Church privileges of every kind must not be made too costly, lest the multitude be shut out of the house of God. If those who affirm that they are divinely called to the work of the ministry refuse to enter the field until they are assured that the Church will maintain them in the position of what the world calls gentlemen, there is reason to fear that they have not heard the call aright.

In the palmiest days of a true Church of God there will be still a place for toil and sacrifice, where men go forth and sow in tears, that they may reap with joy. To be unwilling that the Church should undertake such work is to fail to understand her mission. For any minister to be unwilling to do his share of it, is to make it questionable whether he has either part or lot in the matter. As Christ gave himself a ransom for men; as the apostles counted not their

lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy, and *the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God*, so to the end, the cause must advance by sacrifice and suffering. In poverty, shame, and tears, in hunger, thirst, and weariness, their friends few and feeble, and their enemies many and strong, the first preachers of the Gospel took their lives in their hands, and *beginning at Jerusalem*, went forth on their holy errand. When duty calls, no true successor of the apostles will shrink from following in their footsteps.

If Asbury's first colaborers had waited until an adequate support was guaranteed them and their families, the Methodist Episcopal Church would to-day have no existence. Their worldly condition is thus described by him in a letter written in 1808, to the Rev. Charles Atmore, of the British Wesleyan Conference.

“ We have had great peace and prosperity in our land, and what is remarkable, a great work of God, and we are looking for great

days of divine power. We feel that God is with us, come what may. We are but poor as a ministry. We uniformly allow only eighty dollars to a single, and double to a married preacher, making no provision for extra expenses or children. Our New England Conference alone last year was about three thousand dollars deficient; but the way we do is to make an equal dividend, and we have very little difficulty. Money with us is no article of faith, or term of union, or spring for traveling."

If we look at the entire history of the Christian Church, and contrast the ages of progress with those of stagnation and decay, we find that self-denial and self-sacrifice in the ministry characterize the time of progress, while worldliness and self-seeking mark the dark days of weakness and failure. When ecclesiastical affairs are conducted on the principle that the ministry exist for the sake of the Church and the work, there is victory. When the assumption really acted upon is that the Church exists for the sake of the ministry, there is defeat.

No principle less exalted than that which impelled the apostles of Christ can be the basis of a true and powerful evangelism. If those who come knocking at the door of the ministry are weighing questions of ease, social position, gain, and earthly reward, they are listening to a voice which is not divine. If those who have already entered the door begin to heed the whispers of the world and self, and to struggle for what the world and self call the best places, they are losing the spirit of God. *The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* He is indeed a hireling who is busy calculating the weight of the fleece, and anxiously inquiring in regard to the state of the market.

Let not these observations be misconstrued. They are not intended to palliate the injustice of any congregation that abound in this world's goods, and yet, through avarice or neglect, fail to furnish their pastor a comfortable maintenance. Such conduct is wholly contrary both to the letter of the Scripture and the spirit of the Gospel. Nor

are they designed to condemn the pastor whose lot is providentially cast among a people who know how to *devise liberal things*.

Nor are they intended to silence the just complaints of any true minister of Christ who is ready to perform his share of the toil, and endure his share of the sacrifices demanded for the success of the holy cause ; but who feels that the selfishness and the worldly wisdom of his fellow-workers have contrived to lay upon his shoulders the burdens which they ought to have helped to bear, but which they will not touch with one of their fingers.

Still, in all cases duty must be paramount. Woe to him who enters the field because he hopes to find in it an easier life, larger gains, or a better social position than is otherwise within his reach. Woe to him, already in the field, who coldly canvasses the various openings before him, and deliberately turns, not to the one where he sees the best promise of holy usefulness, but to the one which appeals most strongly to selfish considerations.

Just so far as the ministry suffer themselves to grow anxious and exacting in regard to salary and position, they become unfit for their exalted office. This is emphatically true in regard to an itinerant system like that of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Those who, in the expressive language of our Ritual, "are truly called to this ministration, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ," and have lost nothing of the fervor and self-forgetfulness of their first love, will seek, first of all and most of all, the place where they may do most for the glory of God and the salvation of men, trusting that while they give themselves wholly to their high vocation, God and the Church will not overlook their temporal needs.

Ecclesiastical history, read aright, is full of warning. Scarce a Church organization appears on its pages whose evangelical power did not begin to wane from the day when it grew strong, rich, and prosperous; nor can I shake off the conviction that the ministry themselves were the cause of the sad decline.

3. As the wealth and power of a Church increase, the ministry are involved in stronger temptations to soften the doctrines which they are called to preach, and become less rigid in the administration of Church discipline.

Numbers, wealth, and popular favor in an ecclesiastical body make membership a thing of worldly value, and tend to draw into it a multitude of men and women who seek social recognition rather than spiritual benefit, and whose piety is dwarfed, if not doubtful. When this element enters largely into the structure of a religious society, it never fails to embarrass the work of God. Only half convicted at the best, and only half in earnest, they are careless in the performance of duties which the Scripture enjoins as essential, and are perpetually venturing into paths which the Scripture condemns as dangerous.

They occupy their pews on the Sabbath morning, if the weather is pleasant, and perhaps come again in the evening, provided there is some unusual attraction; but they

seldom attend the prayer-meeting, and never take part therein. Family worship is unknown in their homes. They are recognized as members of the Church, because their names are on the record ; they attend public worship on the Sabbath, and are seen, now and then, at the table of the Lord. But they are sometimes seen also at the opera and the theater. They send their children to dancing schools, and tolerate all manner of frivolous amusements. Worldly, fond of pleasure, and careless of their eternal interests, they are nevertheless respectable people, moral, as the world estimates morality, intelligent, hospitable, pleasant associates, and generous friends. As the Sabbath services are the only part of worship in which they feel an interest, they are naturally critical in regard to the style of the performance. They are captious in respect to the minister's personal appearance and dress, his voice and gestures, his language, the turn of his periods, and the finish of his figures, and best pleased when he *speaks smooth things*.

And just outside of this class is another, made up of men and women who disclaim, with needless emphasis and ostentation, all pretensions to personal piety, and who can, on occasion, even speak slightly of religion, but who nevertheless keep up a sort of remote connection with the Church. They associate chiefly with the members, rent pews, and pay largely toward all Church expenses. So long as they are pleased, they are among the most liberal supporters of the Church. And they are not pleased with a sermon which reveals to them their guilty, lost condition. They would resent, as a personal affront, the pungent, direct, bold manner in which the fathers rebuked sin, and by which they were tolerably sure, either to save the sinner, or drive him away from the church. The false peace of these must not be disturbed, nor their *refuges of lies* torn away, nor even a dim allusion ventured in regard to their questionable practices. These worldly Church members and worldly adherents of the Church must be gratified, or every thing goes wrong. To fail to please

them is to see the congregation diminish, the revenues fall off, the officials in consternation, the people uneasy, and to find hints of the necessity of a change at the next session of the conference floating ominously about.

When worldly men thus become financially necessary to the Church, even worse results are apt to follow. Finding the Church in their power, they are tempted to tyrannize over it, dictating what is to be said in the pulpit, and deciding where there may be speech, and where there must be silence. And, saddest spectacle of all, history shows, that for the sake of its worldly interests the Church of God, as it claims to be, may bow down, and meekly submit not only to tolerate sin, but even to become its apologist and defender. The pope of Rome claims to be the infallible teacher of faith and morals; but he seems to find little use for this formidable weapon, except to flourish it threateningly in the faces of those who question his right to be *lord over God's heritage*. For the last hundred years the Christian world

has been agitated in regard to the lawfulness of human bondage ; but when did papal infallibility even whisper condemnation ? The criminal use of intoxicants is the monster vice of the age ; tens of thousands of Romanists are engaged in the murderous traffic, and tens of thousands of victims annually die under their hands ; yet Roman infallibility will not utter a syllable to save either the murderer or the victim. And why not ? Simply because it is not politic to do so. If too much pressure is applied, the break might occur in the wrong place, and Rome find her most devoted followers more ready to abandon the fold than to give up their sins.

But we need not wander so far in search of illustration. Only twenty years ago, here in our own land, slavery held the Church, as well as the negro, in bondage, and utterly sealed the lips of thousands of ministers. Under the very shadow of the church spire, men and women, recognized as Christians, were placed on the auction block and sold like so many cattle, and yet the pastor of

the Church, if he chanced to pass by while the shameful scene was enacting, dared not express, even by a look, his abhorrence of the stupendous crime.

But we need not wander so far as that. Here at the north, and all through the land, the infamous traffic in alcoholic beverages is filling the whole air with the groans of its victims, and the Christian Churches are too often kept silent by the fact that the interests of the vile trade ramify in all directions; that there are men in the Church itself who own distilleries, breweries, and places where the bane is sold; and if the pulpit should speak out, and tell all the truth, pew rents will diminish and salaries suffer.

It is useless to soften the statement of the fact, when the fact itself is so palpable. When the Church grows rich and strong, when the ministry becomes a desirable profession because of its honors and its rewards, and Church membership valuable in social and business life, then is the time of peril to the pulpit as well as the pew. Then eloquent generalities are likely to be more

lauded than rebukes and warnings in regard to sin, and sentiment more admired than doctrine; and the crowds are apt to leave in the wilderness the man who rudely cries out, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, and flock after him whose performance is *as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument*.

Thus, in the years to come, more and more, unless some counter influence sufficiently strong be found to resist it, there will be a powerful temptation laid before the ministry to depart from the strength and simplicity of the Gospel, and to adopt that style of preaching which gratifies the prevailing taste, attracts the multitude, and makes the finances work easily; to suit their wares to the market, and look out for the highest prices; to cultivate a showy oratory which wins applause, but not souls; which makes the self-satisfied Pharisee burst out in new thanksgivings that he is *not as other men*, but sends no penitent home beating upon his breast, and crying, *God be merciful*

to me a sinner! a sort of eloquence like the harmless lightning of summer showers below the evening horizon, too far away to strike, or even to startle, but which plays off its flashing brilliancy before the eye for a moment, and then goes out in darkness.

Our itinerant system will increase the evil. In other Christian bodies, where the pastor and the Church make their contracts in their own way, the wealthy societies aim to retain popular pastors for long periods. Consequently, the places which worldly men term the best are not perpetually appealing to selfishness and ambition. When an able, acceptable man is installed as pastor of a wealthy flock, the arrangement is regarded as fixed for an indefinite period, and his place, for the time being, is no more an object of effort, or of hope, among those who would aspire to it, if they deemed it within reach.

But among us things are constantly afloat. Every three years, at the longest, there must be a general change, and when the time approaches, preachers and people are naturally

on the alert. With all its advantages, our plan has this undesirable feature, it makes preachers and Churches constant rivals of other preachers and other Churches. That the strife should give rise to measures and expedients of doubtful wisdom is not marvelous; that one man should try to ingratiate himself with the bishops, and thus secure an advantage over his brethren; that another should court the acquaintance of leading laymen, whose wishes may have weight in making appointments; that still another should cultivate a showy style of preaching, which, he hopes, will attract attention in the right quarter, is not at all wonderful.

The same class of temptations will also tend to modify the administration of Church discipline. When the Church has grown into magnitude, and has become expensive, there must be corresponding revenues. The need of a large income is, of itself, a source of temptation. It sends the pastor and the officials to court every wealthy new comer into the neighborhood, while the stranger

who happens to be poor in this world's goods, though rich in faith, may be totally neglected. Those who are able to help largely will be dealt with gently. If they consent to unite with the Church, too much must not be demanded of them, in the way of experience at the beginning, nor afterward in the way of Christian duty. If they deem it more agreeable to them not to unite with the Church, they are to be held to it by friendly attentions, and the exercise of a prudent blindness to their moral eccentricities.

Thus as the Church increases in wealth, and her financial operations are on a large scale, and the ministry becomes an honorable and desirable profession, there is danger that those who occupy the sacred office lose the fervor, the self-forgetfulness, the simplicity, which are the great elements of a true messenger of Christ, and dwindle into decorous inefficiency. It is easy to say that such mercenary motives as have been described should never, for one moment, enter the thoughts of men called of God to the

holy ministry. Even so. But so long as human wants press, there will be temptation and desire, and temptation will invent specious pleas and apologies, and sometimes lure even good men into questionable action. It is wise, therefore, to look the wrong squarely in the face, that we may see all its deformity.



CHAPTER X.

THE PERILS OF ECCLESIASTICAL CENTRALIZATION.

And he came to Capernaum ; and being in the house, he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way ? But they held their peace ; for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest.—MARK ix, 33-34.

I. A STRONG centralized government, like that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has peculiar temptations for the ministry.

Our bishops possess great power. They assign fields of labor to nine thousand pastors. They wield a controlling influence over the religious concerns of more than a million and a half of Church members. Thus they are the chosen guides of a great host. To this post of honor they are elected for life. They have possessed, in the past, the almost unquestioning confidence of the people, and have not been unworthy of it. Their salaries may not be too liberal, yet they are considerably above the average of their

brethren in the ministry. Honored everywhere, not only among our own people, but by other denominations and the whole community, they enjoy the highest favors of the Church, and hold the most responsible office in her gift.

In the years to come, the episcopal office will even grow in outward honor and importance. It is no small thing to-day to be one of the chief pastors of the Church. It will be still greater as numbers, wealth, and social power increase. To suppose that the office will have no charms in the eyes of men, and that no one will be ambitious to attain it; to assume that good men never have enough of original human nature left in them to enable them to feel the temptation, is to forget all that the Scripture reveals of the human heart. To imagine that in the coming years no one will be found whom the temptation is able to turn aside to the use of questionable methods of advancing his own interests, is to forget all human history.

Let us not deceive ourselves. Every

form of ecclesiastical organization has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages, its strong and its weak points. Adopt the principle of the Independents, assume that every local society, with its pastor, is a complete Church, divinely invested with the power to frame its own standard of doctrine, establish its disciplinary regulations, and commission its minister, and that it has no scriptural right so to unite with other Churches as to give them any degree of authority over its affairs, and you have a rope of sand. For lack of organization, the isolated societies can neither come to the effectual rescue, one of another, in times of difficulty, nor combine their strength, fully and permanently, for the accomplishment of great enterprises. The isolated pastor, if deficient in force of character, is powerless in the hands of those whose money supports the Church. If he is a really strong man, he becomes a little pope in his diminutive territory, and fashions doctrines and discipline in his own way. Having no doctrinal anchor to hold him to his moorings, he is liable to

float up and down on the tide of his doubts and conjectures, and finally ground on some shoal formed by the mud which he has himself stirred up. What is called the Independent form of Church government comes very near independence of Church government. It is an exceedingly prolific parent of theological crotchets and pious vagaries, as its history abundantly shows.

On the other hand, the high official positions pertaining to a vigorous, compact organization are a perpetual temptation to ambitious men. The love of power is one of the strongest passions of the human heart. It can find gratification, too, in the Church as well as in the State. Even in apostolic times, and when Christians were few in number, and surrounded by powerful enemies, there was one who *loved the pre-eminence* among them, and so made mischief; and the elders were exhorted to take the oversight of the flock, *not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage.* If such admonitions were needed then,

surely they are not out of place in our own times. It was ambition and the love of power which built up the papal system. There was a time when the Bishop of Rome had less power than that which is wielded by a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church; but a succession of active, bold, ambitious men occupied the chair of St. Peter, so called, and by audacity, craft, and patience, gradually gathered into their hands the reins of a tyranny the most monstrous the world has ever seen.

There is little danger that our Church will degenerate into a new papacy. Hildebrand himself would be powerless in the presence of an intelligent people, with the Scriptures in their hands, and accustomed to rational freedom in Church and State. Still, we do well to remember that the original elements of human nature are the same in all ages. The ambition and selfishness of bad men are always dangerous, and so is the self-deception of good men. In a certain narrative of impossible adventures a wolf is described as attacking, from behind,

the horse of a traveler, and devouring as they ran, totally eating up the victim, and in the process working himself gradually into the harness, and at the end of his voracious meal, galloping along with the sledge as if that had been his original vocation.

As an allegory, the tale is true. Thus an inferior motive may supersede a higher one, and the process be so gradual that it seems slanderous to hint suspicion of the change wrought. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Ecclesiastical ambition may lead its victims into all manner of crooked devices, and easily persuade them, all the while, that they are moved only by zeal for God and the Church. We have divine authority for saying that a man may even murder the followers of Christ, and *think that he doeth God service*. Considering the strength of the passion for pre-eminence and power, and the truly honorable office which, in the present case, furnishes the temptation, it is not altogether visionary to suppose it possible that in the unknown future, when we shall have become still more

numerous, and the deteriorating effects which follow success shall have been more fully developed, men will be found who are capable of plotting for place, even in the Church, and who will employ, in the pursuit, much the same ingenuity and craft which politicians display in party strifes.

But Church offices abound, in addition to the episcopacy. The General Conference has a large amount of patronage in its control. Every four years it elects editors, secretaries, agents, and officials of various descriptions, in no inconsiderable numbers. These offices are more attractive to some minds than the pastoral relation. They do not involve the incessant changes of the pastorate, the salaries are larger, and the luster of place has a degree of fascination.

But assuming that these official positions possess a charm for some men, who may be tempted to plot to obtain them, how will scheming ambition find methods of working? Very easily. Combinations are as potent in Church elections as in those of the State, and success attends those who have the sa-

gacity, skill, and good fortune to form the strongest. Every body who has seen it tried, knows that a single log is a precarious conveyance on which to attempt to cross a stream. It often rolls over, and submerges the bold voyager. But a number of logs, though they may be small ones, may be fastened together, and then they constitute a strong raft, which dares even the rapids. Thus, by uniting their forces, a few active, shrewd men, possessing a taste for this sort of scheming, each able to command a small number of votes in his own locality, lift themselves into the sunshine, and leave in the shadow those who lack skill in Church politics, or for any reason have an aversion to them. Well pinned together, and skillfully steered, even little sticks beat the loose timber. Thus it may be that in the years to come, when the prizes shall have grown into still greater magnitude, and the prosperity of the Church shall have drawn into it those who are capable of yielding to the allurements, men will rise to high places more by maneuvering than by merit.

“But if the work of the Church is well done, where is the harm?” *Much every way.* The successful aspirant, if not wholly lost to honor, will go into office carrying with him uncomfortable recollections, and an uneasy conscience. After he has rehearsed to himself, over and over, all possible excuses, pleading, as the worldly politician does, that plotting is so generally practiced that, without it, no man has the smallest chance of success, there will remain the conviction that it is poor business, utterly unworthy of a Christian minister. To buy votes with votes is as criminal as to buy them with money. The plea that all the candidates in the combination are able men, who will fill the offices well, does not avail. The same plea might be offered in cases of open simony. Whether money or votes furnish the price, the fact, stripped of disguises, is simply this: by means of this method of advancing their interests, men attain office who would not be elected, if each stood, singly and alone, on his own merits. A resort to these arts confesses this fact, else why resort to them?

Plots and strategy of this kind may be only too well known in the party strifes of the political world; but even there they do not command the respect of honorable men. They belong to party mousers, not to statesmen. They sometimes exalt into official stations men who are led more by the hope of plunder than by the love of their country or its institutions. In the Church they should be regarded as fearful sins. What ought we to think of one who by means like these secures his election to the episcopacy, for instance, and then, before the Church and high heaven, declares that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him the sacred office? Peter, blunt and outspoken as he was, would be apt to say to such a candidate for orders, *Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?* And if the guilty aspirant did not fall down dead, like Ananias, it would be simply because the truth of God needs no further attestation of that kind.

It is difficult to imagine how a man of true integrity and honor could submit to the

humiliation of an election thus secured. He must be aware that his methods are not hidden from the public observation. He will need no accuser. He will read the charge in the glance of an eye, and detect it in expressive silence. The secret cannot be kept. It will go in whispers from lip to lip, doing evil all along its way. Among men of genuine piety, it will be a cause of humiliation and sorrow, and give rise to sad forebodings in regard to the future of the Church. Among men whose ideas on the subject of morals are low, it will furnish an excuse for malpractice in general, and a special justification for minor plots of their own. Thus it will grieve some, dull the moral sense of others, and create, on all sides, a sense of insecurity.

And, we repeat it once more, in our form of Church organization mutual confidence is essential, not only to our peace, but to our very existence. The Methodist Episcopal Church is built, we trust, on the foundation of Christ and the apostles; but the cement which holds it together is faith in

each other, especially in the integrity and honor of those who allot our several fields of labor. The very moment we lose this confidence, we are shorn of our strength. Our organization, in its peculiar shape, claims no exclusive warrant in the Scripture. No high-Church folly in regard to "succession" denies us the privilege of changing our form of government, or the methods of administration. Whenever the authorities of the Church cease to command the confidence of pastors and people, revolution or disintegration is inevitable. If that confidence is in any degree impaired, in the same degree will be impaired our attachment to the Church, our faith in its continued success, and the cheerful obedience which we yield to its rigid rules.

How, then, shall we forefend this peril of the future? The moral means are to condemn, utterly and emphatically, all secret plots and combinations, and thus make them infamous. Safeguards might also be incorporated in our Church law. The Church was divided by the General Confer-

ence of 1872 into twelve districts, corresponding with the number of effective bishops. The bishops were also required to distribute their residences, so that each district shall have a bishop resident within its bounds. Let this arrangement continue, with the additional proviso that when a vacancy occurs from any cause in the episcopal force, rendering an election necessary, the right to nominate a candidate to fill the vacancy shall rest with the representatives of the district where the vacancy occurs, permitting them, however, to find their candidate in any part of the work, and, if he is elected, leaving it to the proper authorities to assign him his official duties without any reference to the district which nominated him. This plan possesses more than one good feature. It would diminish the temptation to form secret combinations; it would place the candidates solely upon their personal merits; it would give the ministry in all sections of the Church an equal chance, and thus lessen the suspicions of the influence of the great centers. If the various Church

Advocates were also allotted each a certain territory, and the right to nominate editors were assigned in the same way, it would tend to take them out of the field of Church politics.

Moreover, the plan suggested would remove a great obstacle to the reunion of the Northern and Southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church. We greatly outnumber the Southern Church. If our Southern brethren unite with us, the pastors and people of the Northern Church in Southern territory will, of course, be at once incorporated in the Southern Conferences; but even then, these conferences will form only about a third of the whole numerical strength of the Church. They cannot reasonably be expected to be in haste to be swallowed up by an overwhelming majority, by whom their chosen leaders may at any moment be set aside, and on whose magnanimity they must in all things depend. With suitable guarantees, the invitation to unite with the North would have more weight. The arrangement named would

constitute one such guarantee, and be worth something, if union is desirable.

2. A compactly organized Church, as it grows into strength and magnitude, tends to arrogate to itself a regard to which it has no just claim, a loyalty which belongs only to God and the truth.

The reality of the evil named is not hard to discover, nor are the causes of it altogether hidden. In the case of the ministry, their worldly interests are identified with the Church. It gives them a respectable social position, and furnishes them with a comfortable maintenance. Some of them it exalts to honorable office, and thus gratifies man's natural love of power and pre-eminence. Thus the Church establishes a claim to their regard, and they come to love it, not only because it honors God, but also because it bestows gifts upon men. The laity may also have a certain attachment to it, because they find in it their chief avenue to social recognition, its minor offices gratify their self-respect, and they are so identified with it that its failures are a source of per-

sonal chagrin, and its successes a matter of personal gratification.

Thus it becomes possible for a man to be strongly attached to the Church and yet be very careless in regard to the duties of religion. Indeed, so strange a thing is human nature that those who start tolerably good men may come, in time, to be more zealous for the Church than for either the glory of God or the salvation of souls, and in their blindness, be ready, for the sake of the Church, to sacrifice truth, morality, and religion itself. The more wealthy the Church, the more respectable, as the world measures respectability; and the more compact the form of its organization, the greater the danger of this result. Hence, in minds of a certain type, the Church is liable to become a sort of idol, and the duty of taking care of it to grow into a magnitude which overshadows all others.

When the first Methodist preachers began their labors, there was nothing to take care of but the cause of God. There were no splendid Church edifices, nor ambitious

societies, whose complicated finances would be embarrassed if this or that influential man, hitherto undisturbed in his sins, should take offense at faithful dealing and shut up his purse. There were no liberal salaries which were liable to grow small suddenly, unless sundry pews full of nominal members, and an uneasy crowd of gay and heedless sinners were kept in good humor. The Gospel messenger was no *reed shaken with the wind*. He spoke of heaven and hell, righteousness and sin, with all plainness of speech, and declared *all the counsel of God*, without diminution or apology, without fear or favor.

If men received the truth into their hearts he was glad, and thanked God that so many more of the precious souls for whom Christ died had come from darkness to the light. If they rejected it, he breathed a sigh and a prayer, and rode on his way to his next appointment. He was like a traveler whose staff is in his hand, and his light knapsack upon his shoulders, and who walks slowly or fast, and turns to the right hand or the

left, as suits his convenience or his fancy, only so he completes his allotted journey before the night comes. His clerical successor is more like the engineer of a heavy railway train who has in his charge a complicated engine, a multitude of passengers, and a vast mass of valuable baggage, for all of which he is held responsible, and who must constantly watch the steam gauge, the track, and the motion of the cars, listen every moment for alarm signals, and look out for broken rails and red flags.

When the chief concern of the Church is to take care of itself, its moral and spiritual power is waning, if not totally gone. Must the time come when the Methodist Episcopal Church will have reached this sad stage of degeneracy? We already number a vast membership; we have immense publishing interests, and important benevolent enterprises of various kinds. We collect and expend millions of money every year. Is it not time for us to feel the force of the temptation, and grow cautious, conservative, fearful of the effect of plain speech in the pulpit,

and impartial discipline among the people? The old fable in regard to the halcyon was that she builds her nest upon the surface of the sea, and that while she is sitting upon her eggs, the heavens are always cloudless, and the waters calm. Seeing, then, that our ecclesiastical nest has grown so large, and we have so many promising eggs in the process of incubation, shall we not shun the region of clouds and storms, and court serene skies and quiet seas?

But it may be said that to take care of the Church is to take care of the cause of God. It may be, or it may not. To take care of the Church wisely, and in the fear of God, is to take care of his cause. To conduct the affairs of the Church with an eye solely or chiefly to its worldly success, may be directly hostile to his cause. The difference between the two methods is simply the difference between a principle and a policy. If we forget self, and think only of God and truth, and the perishing souls around us, we have great principles to guide our action. If we think first and last, and

all the time, of what we call the interests of the Church, its popularity in the community, its finances, the value of membership in it in regard to social or business life, we are in danger of leaving great principles, and of setting ourselves to devise a policy.

To take care of the Church, as an organization, is not the one great duty. A soldier who makes it his great duty to take care of himself, will never do the enemy much harm. A general whose favorite strategy is never to place his troops under fire, will never win a victory. A wise commander, indeed, will not sacrifice the life of a man needlessly, nor will he suffer himself to be drawn into battle at a disadvantage; but when the right moment comes, he dashes his forces against the lines of the enemy with a fury which looks more like recklessness than prudence.

The Church of God needs something of this desperate courage. A cowardly Church, conducted on the cautious maxims of time-serving prudence, is the grief of good men, and the contempt of the bad. Sin is not

timid. It gathers formidable forces, arms and organizes them, and boldly takes the field. It sweeps into its serried columns talent, learning, cunning, wealth, numbers, and hypocrisy. It offers battle at every point, and proves itself no despicable antagonist. Make the attack when and where we will, we find its sentinels alert and its troops in force. If we assault even the lowest forms of vice, we find that they rally for a desperate defense, ready to employ perjury, political influence, tricks of law, or open violence, as occasion demands. In a warfare like this, what is a Church worth whose creed is indefinite, whose discipline exists merely on paper, whose preaching is the droning out of weak common-places, or the pretentious parade of rhetorical nothings which disturb nobody, and whose sole aim on earth is to take care of itself? There are times when a true Church will go into battle reckless of every thing but God and the right ; just as the brave captain of a ship of war lays his vessel alongside of his antagonist and opens fire with all his guns,

determined that one or the other shall go to the bottom.

The present times do not lack occasion for this moral heroism. Wickedness abounds and wears a front of brass. Compared with the advantages which it possesses, this boasted age of progress is no great improvement on those which have gone before it. Every precept of the Decalogue is daily and openly trampled in the dust. Profanity resounds on all sides, and the very air is thick with curses. The morals of trade are low. Men gamble frantically in stocks and gold, and ruin each other with as little remorse as wolves feel when they devour a wounded member of their own gang. There is an insane desire after grand houses and fine furniture, costly dress and showy equipage, which not only exhausts the means of multitudes, but drives not a few into fraud. The slaughter of the innocents goes on steadily in secret, because large families increase expense and care, and interfere with the shallow pursuits of fashionable life. The liquor-selling infamy is omnipresent, and almost

omnipotent, the whole nation well-nigh helpless under its murderous hands.

If we may believe a tithe of what politicians say of each other, public life is fearfully corrupt, party strifes are carried on chiefly by falsehood and bribery, and fraud abounds in high places. And the worst feature of all is that men tainted, and more than tainted, with these leprosies, but at the same time smooth in their manners, and free with their money, easily find some branch of what claims to be the Church of God, which, in return for the material aid which they give, welcomes them into its fold, and flatters them with the idea that they are good Christians when they are not decent heathen.

To do well the work which the Lord requires of it, the Church must *be strong and very courageous*, boldly defending the right, boldly attacking the wrong. It is not difficult to see, that as the Church grows in numbers, wealth, and popularity, it is tried by fires worse than those kindled by either pagan or papal Rome. Nor is it difficult to

detect the point where the fatal infection commences. I cannot resist the conviction that when a Church which began small and despised of men, but *strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*, has won its way to greatness and popular favor, and has then forgotten the burning evangel by which its victories were gained, and lost the spirituality and the purity of its earlier history, and paused in its career of conquest, the guilty cause of failure is in the ministry itself. When the pastoral office becomes a "profession," like law and medicine; and the places most coveted are where the salary is liberal, the social position respectable, and the duties not burdensome; when young men entering upon their ministry turn with disgust from the hard work and poor fare which have been the lot of better men all their lives; and older men elbow and push each other in their strife for office and honors, the evangelical power of that Church is gone. When the ministry gives way, the battle is lost.

Stripped of its verbal disguises, and clothed

in plainness of speech, this idea of exalting the Church, and making it every thing, is simply looking after the interests of the clergy. An earnest, faithful, self-sacrificing ministry never fails to win the sincere respect of the people, never fails to win souls to Christ. An easy-going, time-serving ministry, going through its round of duties in a perfunctory way, is powerless to silence the skeptic, or rebuke sin. The people see. Nothing can supply the place of moral power. When it is lost, men resort to various devices. Under a despotic government, the priest will join hands with the tyrant, the Church propping the throne, and the throne subsidizing the Church from the public treasury, and lending the arm of the law to secure for it an obedience and outward respect which it cannot obtain on its own merits. Then crafty clerics appeal to the superstitions of the weak and ignorant, trumping up some ecclesiastical fraud in regard to the laying on of hands, or the mysterious efficacy of sacraments *ex opere operato*, thus attempting to give the Church

a claim to the homage of men, aside from the truth of its doctrine and the purity of its life.

In every depth of this kind there is a lower deep. To exalt the Church, to make devotion to its interests a substitute for personal piety, not only makes it spiritually powerless, but also prepares the way for all manner of crime. The foulest, cruelest deeds which crimson the historic page, were perpetrated by men who claimed that they were engaged in defending the Church of God against her enemies. I need not refer again to papal Rome, with her fires and instruments of torture. Christ himself was delivered over to death by Church politicians, who were looking out for themselves under the pretense of defending the Jewish beliefs and customs. At the beginning, scribe and Pharisee were astonished at his words of power, and the mighty deeds which he did; and if he had allied himself to them, identified himself with them, and built them up in influence and honor before the people, they would have received him gladly, and never

tired of his praises. But when he attacked them publicly, exposing their ignorance of the very things in which they claimed to be wise, calling them *blind leaders of the blind*, denouncing them as hypocrites, and rejecting their companionship, choosing that of publicans and sinners instead; when they saw that his influence over the popular mind was steadily undermining theirs, they were ready to murder him.

The worst crimes of the Church, in all her lengthened history, have been the crimes which were professedly committed in her defense; and her worst errors have been the doctrinal fabrications which men have invented for the purpose of increasing her power. Once establish the maxim that loyalty to the ecclesiastical organization of which we are members constitutes the sum and substance of pious duty, and all heights of usurpation, and all depths of wickedness, become possible.

There is a point beyond which no man need concern himself in regard to the Church of God. Let us again recur to military life

for illustration. In every campaign there is a commander-in-chief, whose authority is supreme. He plans the whole operation, and is alone responsible for its success. His subordinate officers are under his sole authority. He assigns them their duties, and issues his instructions. So long as these officers obey the orders given them, and do their work bravely, skillfully, and to the best of their ability, they are doing their whole duty. Where any thing is left to the discretion of the officer, he must indeed be discreet; but where a command is absolute, all that is required of him is to do, faithfully and well, the thing, the very thing, named in his orders. If he does it, he is safe from censure, even if the result be disastrous.

Thus Christ is *the Captain of our salvation*, the great head of the Church militant. He has planned the campaign, and placed his army in the field. He has put a message into the lips of his ministers, and a work into the hands of his Church. In regard to forms and ceremonies, and modes of

administration, something is left to human judgment; but on points of faith and of morals, there is no discretion. The orders are absolute. The Church must not shun to *declare all the counsel of God*, the whole of his law, the whole of his Gospel. For the consequences which follow the right performance of his duty the messenger of Christ is not responsible. He may exult in victory, he may deplore defeat, but in either case, if he obeys orders wisely and faithfully, he receives the commendations of Him that sent him. Whether he is *the savor of life unto life*, or of *death unto death*, to them that hear, he is responsible neither for the tenor of the message, nor for the mode of its reception.

In fine, some of the principal conclusions to which our observations, studies of ecclesiastical history, and methods of reasoning have conducted us, are these:—

1. That the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the hands of God, and through the divine simplicity and power of the doctrines

which it proclaims, the vivid experience which it cultivates, and the efficiency of its methods of evangelism, has accomplished a marvelous work in a brief space of time.

2. That one distinctive feature of our economy, our method of distributing ministerial labor, is an instrument of great evangelical power, essential to the maintenance of the full aggressive force of our Church, and the continuance of its rapid progress.

3. That the itinerancy is that feature of our system which created the episcopacy, the presiding eldership, and shaped the entire organization, and that the responsibilities of supervision and control now delegated to these two branches of the superintendency must be lodged somewhere, intact, or the itinerancy, and with it the aggressive power of the Church, will decline as they are diminished, and be virtually destroyed when an efficient appointing agency ceases to exist.

4. That the various propositions made to modify the responsibilities of the appointing

power, while they may aim at the removal of defects which have a real existence, have in them all an element of danger, imperiling the efficiency of our itinerant system; and that in dealing with interests of such magnitude, we should proceed with great caution.

5. That the itinerant system is a distinct and practical recognition of the scriptural principle, that the ministry exists for the sake of the work to be done, and that the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church are called to maintain a willing, practical loyalty to it.

6. That the very successes of the Church involve us in new and great perils, both to the ministry and the laity, and that nothing can save us from them but deep and intelligent piety toward God, and the strictest integrity, honor, and brotherly love and confidence among ourselves.

7. That our compact organization, while efficient above all loose systems, holds out strong temptation to ambitious men, and that while we aim to retain every essential

feature of our government, we would do well to avoid needless centralization, and to scatter power to localities where there will be less temptation, and less opportunity, for unwise and inexpedient efforts to secure position.

THE END.

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